An Action Research Approach to Poverty Reduction/From Academic Idea to Working NGO

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Action Research and Service Learning as Longitudinal Approaches to Poverty Eradication, Economic Development, and Human Development *is a paper originally prepared for International Action Research Conference in 2007 by Warner P. Woodworth, Ph.D and Peter Jay Sorenson CMC® and is copyright of the authors. The paper is reproduced here with their permission.*

Action Research and Service Learning as Longitudinal Approaches to Poverty Eradication, Economic Development, and Human Development

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Abstract

The global pandemic of poverty affects the lives of billions of people. On a macro-global level the United Nations Millennium Goals have focused attention on poverty. But strategies and tactics need to be formulated and enacted that strike at the roots of poverty and create economic self-sufficiency for the individuals and families affected. Microfinance is emerging as a powerful tool to bridge the gap between global awareness and individual and family level change.

How can we create broad involvement in economic and social development over a long time frame to build the momentum that is be required to turn back the pandemic of poverty? The challenge is to create an ever-growing group of social entrepreneurs that both have experience combating poverty and a commitment to live their lives engaged in that work.

During the last two decades Professor Warner Woodworth has taught courses on Third World Development and Social Entrepreneurship at The Marriott School of Management at BYU. Under his influence BYU has become an incubator for the creation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and social entrepreneurs.

Two foundational approaches in these classes are the use of action research and service learning methodology. The action research approach creates learning to both guide individual projects and contribute to an ever-expanding body of intellectual capital to carry forth to future challenges and projects. Human capital is created as the students who participate in these classes and projects make the individual and collective sacrifice to serve others and deliberately learn from their experience. They develop a deep knowledge of how to help people develop to the boundaries of their potential. And they develop a heart-felt commitment to doing so throughout the remainder of their lives.

In this presentation and paper the general approach to the classroom teaching/learning process will be described, one field project, the creation and eight year development of the NGO HELP International, will be used as an example, and the overall impact of the approach will be described. Specific tools, methods, and approaches used in HELP International will be discussed. Specific qualitative action research results from observation, one-on-one interviews, and focus group discussions on the field project will be presented. Each element of the paper and presentation will demonstrate the merit of the combined approach of action research and service learning.

The paper will conclude with a description of the challenges lying ahead for HELP International and a challenge to the academic, NGO, consulting, and for-profit organizational communities to become involved in the work as collaborators across organizational and geographical boundaries.

Introduction

This paper documents how action research may be integrated with university based service-learning strategies to improve the quality of life for the Third World poor, while enhancing and enriching student learning through action-based education. The particular case at hand is that of the Marriott School of Management at Brigham Young University, where Organization Development work has occurred for two decades to mobilize students, alumni, faculty, and the business community in empowering the poor. Business models and concepts such as finance, motivation theories, planning and decision making, cross cultural management, conflict and negotiation, change management, leadership, and marketing-to-design projects are used.

In the sections below we will highlight the socio-economic context in which this action research is done. What follows is a case in which the authors designed a project to fight poverty, implemented it in the Third World, and eventually spun it off as a non-governmental organization (NGO) called HELP International (http://www.help-international.org/). Action-based learning methodologies that were employed are analyzed, along with various other tools. Examples are provided, and a critique of success and current challenges is articulated. The paper concludes by illustrating how partnerships between academia and the business world were established, along with suggestions for future collaboration between consultants, business schools, corporations, and NGOs.

Section 1 - Third World Poverty

Globally there is a huge chasm between rich and poor societies. It is manifest in the per capita income gap between the industrialized world and developing nations. For over a billion of the planet's population, the suffering of the poor is manifest in the fact that they try to eke out an existence on less than one dollar a day. Another 1.3 billion struggle to survive on less than two dollars a day. Some 600 million of the world's children are not in school; many of them forced to labor in the fields and factories along side their parents. Illiteracy among adults in the Third World is a significant problem, as are such difficulties as poor health care, infant mortality, natural disasters, and diseases like HIV-AIDS and malaria.

Below are a few concrete facts (Reality of Aid, 2006; UN Millennium Project, 2006):

- The World Bank estimates that from 1992-2002 the poorest countries on the planet received 43 percent less aid than predicted from previous decades, based on their poverty levels.
- In sub-Sahara Africa between 1990-2001 the population of the poorest of the poor, people who live on less than $1 a day, rose from 227 million to 313 million.
- One individual in three from such countries suffers from malnourishment, and half of their children die before age five.
- Spending to aid sub-Sahara Africa is now less than it was in 1990.
- For the first time since the Iron Curtain went down, military spending around the world grew to over $1 trillion.
- The U.S. is spending over $300 billion per year in Iraq and Afghanistan alone, 76 times more than its Official Development Assistance for health, 196 times its ODA for education, and 480 times its ODA allocated for sanitation and clean water worldwide.

- Eleven million children die annually from diseases related to poverty. Some 300-500 million individuals are infected with malaria, leading to approximately 3 million deaths a year.
- HIV AIDS kills an estimated 6,000 people each 24 hours (2.2 million people per year), while 8,000-plus more are infected each day.
- Millions of school age children are working in fields, factories, or for their families, rather than receiving a basic education.
- 584 million women are illiterate.
- Some 800 million people go to bed hungry every day, one-third of them being children.
- Over 2.6 billion individuals lack basic sanitation.
- One billion people do not have access to clean drinking water.
- Forty percent of the world's population lacks access to even a simple latrine.
- Back in the 1960s, Africa was a net exporter of food; today, the continent must import one-third of its grain.

Section 2 - The World is Changing – Attempted Solutions

There have been numerous strategies in recent decades attempting to solve the problem of exploding poverty. They include such macro-level interventions as the Green Revolution, which sought to transfer western-style farming methods and equipment to the Third World. Another thrust was modernization, i.e. attempting to impose the well-established political and economic systems of industrialized nations to poor countries. In the 1980s, there was a movement to provide the world's poor with basic needs such as clean water, schools, health care, and so forth.

But each of these strategies had deficiencies. The transfer of technology was not as simple as expected. Many modernization efforts were inconsistent with native people's cultural values. Western agriculture depleted the soil in many countries, and providing basic needs was not only costly, but also unsustainable.

In more recent years other strategies have been implemented. For example, the U.N. established a series of "Millennial Goals," which would raise the donor commitments from rich nations in order to help the poor (UN 2006). Well known academics, such as Jeffery Sachs of the Earth Institute, Columbia University, has popularized the "end of poverty" as an important worldwide objective (2005). Corporate chiefs like Bill Gates of Microsoft (2007) have established family foundations for channeling funds to qualifying development programs. Bono, the lead singer of U-2, the Irish rock band, has played a major role in pressuring officials of wealthy nations to forgive the debts owed by Third World countries (ONE, 2006). Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 because of his impact in using Microcredit to not only lift the poor of Bangladesh, but creating a ripple-effect in spreading bottom-up economic development throughout the world (Yunus, 2003).

Finally, former U.S. President, Bill Clinton, has entered the fray by establishing his new Clinton Global Initiatives (2007). Using his considerable clout, he has organized a series of meetings to bring prominent people together, share ideas, make financial commitments, and implement them. Such individuals include current and former heads of states around the world, royal families, major corporate CEOs, NGO officials, bankers, and so forth. So far, some 570 commitments have been made to various poor countries and projects globally. Some regions being targeted by CGI include Latin America (6 %), Middle East (7 %), Asia (11 %), North America (19 %), and Africa (20 %). So far these "commitments" have generated over $2 billion, and partnerships are being planned for numerous additions.

Among many impoverished people, their problem is that of unemployment and/or under-employment. They cannot obtain jobs because of the lack of investment in the formal economy. In many instances they lack the job skills necessary when there is a factory opening or other job available. Thus, for many of these people the challenge becomes that of creating their own jobs through some form of income-generating projects. Those who struggle in this environment, that of the informal, underground economy (or black market)(de Soto, 2000), face the enormous challenge of obtaining capital for their micro enterprises. These are often hard-working, creative individuals who simply seek opportunity and self-employment. But to launch or to grow their micro enterprises, they require credit, a small amount of working capital to run their tiny businesses and move toward profitability. A lack of access to financial capital thus becomes their major challenge.

Most such individuals cannot obtain financing from regular banks for several reasons. Often, the miniscule amount needed is so small that banks cannot justify the overhead expense of servicing such small loans. Also, the poor usually lack financial credibility. They have no credit history and no collateral that would be equivalent to the loan size needed. For most of them their only option for financing is from a "loan shark" who may charge as much as 300 to 3,000 percent annually. It makes the possibility of success virtually nonexistent. As conservative Milton Friedman, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics, puts it, "The poor stay poor not because they are lazy, but because they have no access to capital." They are essentially trapped in a losing situation and are unable to get ahead.

The most innovative strategy for addressing this global problem is the recent emergence of Microcredit as a tool for lifting the poor out of poverty. To clarify the meaning of this concept and its associated terms, the following definitions are necessary:

- Microcredit: tiny loans of $50 to $200 each to poor individuals
- Microentrepreneurs: recipient of a microloans with which to start or expand one's small business
- Microenterprise: a very small, income-generating activity or family business
- Micro-bank: village or communal bank group
- Microfinance: a more inclusive term for all the above, plus, perhaps such programs as client savings accounts, health insurance for the poor, education loans, etc.
- MFI: Micro-Finance Institution which may provide multiple financial services
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organization that offer a range of humanitarian and development services such as literacy, health care, education, schools, aid in response to a crisis such as natural disaster, village development programs, agriculture, women's empowerment, as well as Microcredit.

Section 3 - Universities as Incubators of Action Research

The Marriott School at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, U.S.A. has emerged as one of the first pro-poor business schools in the United States. The University has a number of competitive advantages because of its institutional connection to its sponsoring church. Some 72 percent of students speak a second language, most of them learning to do so by living abroad for two years as Mormon missionaries. They become fluent in the language, understand and appreciate other cultures, and love the people. BYU teaches over 60 different languages on campus, more than twice those of the second most diverse language offerings being the 25 languages taught at Yale University. The school also has the largest study abroad program of any American university. Finally, students attend BYU from over 130 countries.

Drawing on these student strengths in the early 1990s, the authors began to organize a group of individuals to center our research on Microcredit. A commitment to using one's academic work to better the world by empowering students as global change agents was agreed upon. New courses and action research, action learning, and service learning methods were established. The initial area of emphasis was to send students out into the field to study the impact of Microcredit. As the training of individuals has broadened to include teaching non-profit management and humanitarian skills the scope of the fieldwork has broadened. Partnerships were sought with external consultants, business leaders, entrepreneurs, and socially responsible corporations.

Some of the results of these efforts include 17 years in which over 700 students were mobilized, trained, and sent them off to combat poverty and create greater economic justice among marginalized communities. For 13 years new courses or classroom modules have been initiated in social entrepreneurship, Microcredit systems, Third World development and NGO management. Over the past nine years, an annual conference on Microenterprise development has occurred at BYU and the Journal of Microfinance began being published, the first of its kind in this emerging field. PBS also did an impressive documentary film, "Small Fortunes: Microcredit and the Future of Poverty" (2005), on the programs of our NGO partners.

One of this paper's authors formed a number of NGOs, which started as classroom student projects, and eventually were formally incorporated as 501 (C) 3 non-profit social enterprises. For this paper, HELP International is analyzed as a case of action research and service learning, an illustration of what may be accomplished.

Section 4 - HELP International Origin and History

An instance of Marriott School initiative in humanitarian work and microfinance is that of HELP International (HELP). It is an innovative example of utilizing student volunteers, local entrepreneurs, alumni, and faculty in mobilizing collective efforts to serve the poor in Latin America. It began in response to the terrible destruction of Hurricane Mitch in Central America at the end of 1998. Facing the question of whether or not a business school has anything of relevance to offer in a natural disaster, which devastated a huge region, a new, not-for-credit course was established 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 they might assist the victims of the hurricane. In spite of cynics at the university, who claimed students could not address such major catastrophes, 46 volunteers were prepared, 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 50 bank groups of FINCA International, the 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 HELP 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.

So much for the cynics and naysayer!

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. Over $250,000 was donated and teams were sent to continue the efforts in Honduras, as well as to expand to Venezuela, Peru, and El Salvador. More partnerships were made 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.

In the subsequent years, HELP has enlarged the scope of its efforts by going to Guatemala, Brazil, Bolivia, and Uganda, as well as continued its work in El Salvador. From the hundred-plus village banks started early on, today it has NGO partners that offer various other services to the poor: Microenterprise education, square foot gardening, literacy, women's empowerment, home construction, agricultural and other appropriate technologies, as well as training in computer skills and English as a Second Language (ESL), serving in rural health clinics, teaching in schools, and volunteering in orphanages. HELP has worked to build 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, Wal-Mart, Unitus, and Intel. They have collectively led to huge impacts among the poorest of the poor. Not only has HELP drawn on students from BYU over these years, but also from a dozen other schools like Stanford, Colorado State, Virginia Tech, and Washington University.

Section 5 - Key Characteristics of HELP Organization & Working Environment

HELP's vision began to shift several years ago, aided by the assistance of several BYU alumni, who have had superb careers as organizational change consultants, one of them being the co-author of this paper, Peter Sorenson. During a 10-day board of directors site visit trip to El Salvador they led the HELP board through a strategic retreat lasting several days. The key task of the retreat and follow up work was assessing, clarifying, and reformulating the organization's mission. From that experience, HELP shifted its vision statement from a sole focus on fighting poverty to a new mantra: "To provide our volunteers with a life-changing experience." The group had finally realized that they were not making much of a dent in the burgeoning growth of

Third World poverty, so much as HELP was having a significant impact in the individual lives of its volunteers. What had been learned over time was that these young social entrepreneurs, who had spent several months in Latin America, were returning to finish their college educations with a new realization of their ability to change the world. They realized that none of them could do everything, but that each could do something. As reported later in this paper, many of them have launched Third World projects of their own as they graduated from school and went off to begin their careers. In sum, through their HELP experience, they became empowered and many of them committed to designing further poverty-fighting strategies on their own.

HELP's capacity for having these kinds of impacts arises from its "intangible assets." These are factors that have made HELP not only survive in the growing world of humanitarian outreach, but thrive. They are not easily ascertained by reading reports, talking to staff, or by going to its website; but rather these dimensions operate below the surface.

Some of the important assets include the following: Intellectual Capital — Well-trained young people, who not only learn about development from the University, but are bright and talented individuals simply because they were admitted to a leading college with rigorous admission requirements; Practical Know-How — Derived from HELP's internal training and preparation for volunteers that occurs before departure; Partner Relationships – HELP's ability to find and establish effective connections between its cadre of volunteers and in-country NGOs, which can maintain and expand the work started by HELP after the volunteers leave; Donor Relationships – Established through informal and formal connections with a few major corporate donors, but more importantly, with students who do their own fundraising through family and personal connections; In-the-Trenches Experience – Sweating through one's labor with rural villagers in the Third World during a summer deepens one's appreciation for blessings back home, and raises the consciousness of volunteers, who see the suffering of the poor, both of which generate unique and powerful experiences for these volunteers; Reputation – Through the media, informal word-of-mouth, community presentations, and other networks, HELP International's recognition and credibility is considerable.

Shifting to the current time frame, in 2007 HELP trained and sent out about 75 of its own volunteers. In addition to that number, HELP's partner organization The Carolina Microfinance Initiative (CMI), based at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, send a 15-person team to Peru. The latter group will be briefly discussed later. HELP's core countries in 2007 consisted of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uganda.

For these three countries HELP first recruited and selected student country directors. Those individuals went through an extensive management preparation training process, which focused on such topics as team building, problem solving, leadership skills, conflict resolution, and managing time, leading people, policy, practice, and procedure, communications, and financial management. Ultimately co-directors were chosen for each of the three countries. They spent the full summer of four months in-country, managing the teams of volunteers, working with partner NGOs, distributing expenditures, and communicating with the HELP office in the U.S. (telephone calls, email questions, and weekly reports). There were between 20 and 30 volunteers per country.

With respect to the larger teams of volunteers, they too went through several days of intense training and preparation. The top priority for these sessions was that of in-country safety (awareness of dangers, being inside at night, always traveling at least in pairs, and so forth). Other training they engaged in included an overview of Third World development, group processes and effective roles, social entrepreneurship skills, how to maintain one's health, rudimentary Spanish for those who were not fluent, etc.

In addition, the groups were each trained in a variety of humanitarian services so that they could maximize their impacts while in country. HELP offers several core services to clients and villagers of our in-country partners. The three most important are 1) Training on how to start a small business, 2) Teaching English as a second language, and 3) Square foot garden methodology. After completing these days of training, volunteers depart for their respective destinations in small groups. Usually there are 8 to 14 volunteers in each country at a time, where they volunteer from 4 to 12 weeks. Over the summer, these departing groups leave the U.S. in 3 waves, spread out over the summer months. In other words, there is a May 1st departure group for each country, a June 1st group, and a July 1st group. Co-directors in country had already established systems for picking up the new arrivals, having their residential places arranged for, and worked out the tasks and assignments with the local NGOs. Thus, there is a smooth transition from the U.S. team to the Third World nation.

With respect to the types of services performed by HELP's volunteers, the options are many over a 4-month period. As social entrepreneurs, individuals are encouraged to become aware of problems beyond the basic HELP training. They are invited to use their own initiative in analyzing such problems, exploring solutions, and requesting supplemental funding from HELP to implement their own projects. But this is above and beyond the traditional services offered by HELP as an organization.

What are some additional services that are typically offered by HELP volunteers? They include the following: Support work consisting of training and consultation for the clients of microfinance partners; workshops on how to start a microenterprise; teaching about nutrition and personal health; volunteer in health and dental clinics, as well as hospitals; teaching how to build adobe stoves; building homes with partners such as Habitat for Humanity; volunteering in orphanages; teaching English in various settings; consulting on program design with NGO partners; teaching computer skills, and so forth.

Section 6 - Carolina Microfinance Initiative

This year HELP began to collaborate more formally with university groups at other campuses. Although students from different schools have joined HELP as individual volunteers, the first formal partnership occurred in 2007 with the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Students and their Faculty Advisor, Lisa Jones Christensen of the Kenan-Flagler Business School, have established the Carolina Microfinance Initiative (CMI) to bring together students, corporate donors, microfinance institutions, Carolina community members, and entrepreneurs of the developing world. In this emerging experiment, students have been trained by UNC campus faculty, as well as the executive director of HELP International, based in Utah. The group supported an existing Microcredit NGO in Peru in order to help it serve more clients with additional loans and training. During this summer students conducted impact assessments on their work and that of their Peruvian partners. They plan to hold several events on campus to mobilize support for microfinance, and have committed to provide ample donor feedback. To do this, they will document activities and outcomes for each donor, as well as for future volunteers.

Section 7 - Micro and Macro-Organizational Role of Action Research and Service Learning Processes

This section of the paper will deal with the practical day-to-day application of the methodologies, tools, and mechanisms of working that support the use of action research within the context of the projects that HELP International is currently doing in the developing world. These "practices" have arisen from a decade of "sandals and sneakers on the ground" development work. We will start by getting very specific as we briefly describe three projects conducted in 2007 and identify key elements of each project.

Project Example #1:
This year in Guatemala a young woman named Andrea Despain took over a library creation project from the technical expert and project creator (Phyllis Hall) when that person left the country. Andrea identified several more communities that needed and wanted libraries, worked with community leaders to design the projects, enlisted other volunteers to work on different aspects of the project, and found a new source of books and funding to help make the libraries meet the needs of the children and adults in the community. She exercised initiative to extend the project and broaden the scope of the books and multi-media materials placed in the library. When Andrea left Guatemala she handed the project off to Rachel McKneely, one of the Country Directors, for follow up action.

Key Elements:

- Conducting project handoff / transition
- Diagnosing needs
- Building relationships with NGO leaders and staff, village leaders, moms, and children
- Exercising initiative, creativity, and project management
- Influencing without authority
- Using participation to build commitment and ownership
- Extending project scope
- Using temporary project teams with shifting membership and roles

Project Example #2:
One of the young women in El Salvador, Blanca Rodriguez, decided she wanted to organize and execute a big project. She collaborated with one of our partner NGO's, Alpimed, to create a program to educate families and children of people who have left their village of Suchitoto to go to the USA to work. The primary focus of the project was on how to better use the remittance money that the family members sent back to El Salvador. She and other volunteers went into community schools and worked with the teachers and students to organize a contest to create skits and murals to illustrate not only the wise use of the remittances, but also the dangers and

risks of illegal immigration, and the need for education. The classes and schools competed for the opportunity to perform their skits and display their murals on a Saturday the 7th of July 2007 in the town square for the whole community. They were rewarded for their efforts with learning materials awarded for each individual class member and for their classrooms. The mayor of the city spoke to the crowd both before and after the performances. The day was hot and uncomfortable in the bright, unrelenting El Salvadoran sunlight, but the enthusiasm of the children, teachers, and parents made it all worthwhile. All of the volunteers willingly participated in the Saturday activities.

Key Elements:

- Partnering with NGO leaders and staff to create a complex project
- Building strong working relationships and doing tight coordination with NGO leaders and staff, city and school leaders, teachers, and children and HELP volunteers
- Exercising initiative, creativity, and project management
- Influencing without authority
- Using participation to build learning, commitment, and ownership
- Using temporary project teams with shifting membership and roles

Project Example #3:
A young woman named Natalie Roe, who was not fluent in Spanish, was given extra training in adobe stove building (estufas) and became the team leader (La Reina de las Estufas) on the stove building project in Guatemala. She managed the stove building calendar, working closely with the local NGO leaders who arranged with the indigenous communities for stove building activities. With a group of 6 to 20 of her colleagues she would go to a village, working with the men and women of the village, teaching them how to build low cost adobe stoves by building one or more stoves with them. In 2006 the volunteers built 14 stoves and the villagers went on to build more than 140 stoves. In 2007, under Natalie's leadership, the volunteer teams build about 45 stoves and the villagers built over 400 stoves. As the summer wore on, stove-building requests increased and came from new sources as word of mouth spread about the benefits of stoves and the availability of training on how to build and use them.

Key Elements:

- Mastering the technical knowledge necessary to design and execute the project
- Partnering with NGO leaders and staff to create a series of small but complex projects
- Sustaining enthusiasm and commitment over a long period of time
- Building relationships with NGO leaders and staff, village leaders, moms, and children
- Doing ongoing, persistent, constructive coordination with NGO partners
- Exercising initiative, creativity, and project management
- Influencing without authority
- Using participation to build commitment and ownership
- Extending project scope
- Using temporary project teams with shifting membership and roles
- Demonstrating openness to reflective thinking and feedback through the use of After Action Review, an action research and action learning technique

- Demonstrating innovation, flexibility, and adaptability

Temporary Project Teams (TPT):

The work done by our volunteers rides on the back of the use of temporary project teams with fluid membership and roles. As mentioned in the previous section there are numerous projects that volunteers create, organize, and execute while they are in country. When they arrive in country they are usually put to work on existing projects that the co-country directors or other volunteers have organized. In virtually every instance these projects are done in partnership with local NGO's that have ongoing programs that are aimed at creating economic self-sufficiency and eliminating poverty and suffering. We provide staffing, and in come cases funding, to these projects.

We expect the volunteers to exercise initiative within existing projects, to extend projects beyond their initial scope, and to identify new needs (diagnosis) around which projects can be created. There is a strong, explicit organizational norm that volunteers are expected to exercise initiative and be self-starters in their approach to the work whether their role is that of a team member or team leader. The data gathering tools of observation, informal conversation, formal interviews, and reading are all critical elements of exercising initiative in the diagnosis and follow up phases of action research.

Additionally team leaders are expected to exercise a collaborative approach to leadership that is characterized by both humility and boldness. Team leaders on the one hand must clearly identify the needs of both the NGO and the people being served. They need to move boldly to organize the response to the need, but do so with humility and gentleness, and deference to the role of the individual, family, and village in creating self-reliance for themselves. And it all must be done in support of the NGO through whom we are working.

Cultural sensitivity is clearly an imperative! All this work is done in the context of the family, village, and country. Slow is faster. When you work to build relationships of understanding and trust learning increases, confidence builds, and commitment and ownership begin to jell. Cultural sensitivity is a key element and is constantly examined.

In regard to their teammates, the team leaders must also exercise humility. They must elicit the willing support of their colleagues. It is not a command and control environment. On the one hand it is clearly necessary to make sure the work is done with discipline. On the other hand motivation must be approached from an intensive, participative perspective that generates commitment on the part of their colleagues.

The team structure and process can work only if all of the volunteers know and accept that they are expected to be flexible, adaptable, and responsive. One day they will be the project leader on one project, the next three days they will be a team member on other projects.

Action Research/Service Learning Interpretation:

The temporary project team structure and process is the primary organizational vehicle through which the action research and service learning processes are enacted. As they work in these temporary project teams an action research mindset is an important sieve through which to judge how to learn and adjust to emerging situations.

Season Set Up:

Training for Volunteers & Country Directors:

Developing capability and competency in the Country Directors and Volunteers is a key issue that is struggled with each year. Everyone in the group comes to the HELP experience with a different personality, preferred learning style, background, experience, and education. Each year we need to do some level of "mass customization" in aiming our development process at the specific needs of the individual volunteer. And yet training classes and materials have to be somewhat generic. Our response choice to these issues is that we use experiential exercises and dialogue in our training as much as possible. We also depend on the follow-up reinforcement of on-the-job coaching in country to round out and shape the learning experience for each volunteer throughout the season that they spend in country.

The newest challenge is that as time goes on more and more of our volunteers are spread across the length and breadth of the USA. We are therefore doing more virtual training and teleconferencing than we have ever done before. We are also taking training to clusters of volunteers in different geographical locations.

In designing and executing our learning activities we are using the resources of Board Members, Advisory Board Members, Other NGO's, The Economic Self-Reliance Center (BYU – Marriott School), Staff, & Volunteers.

Day-to-Day Action Research/Service Learning Tools (TPT Level):

Daily and Weekly Project Team Meetings:

Each project team leader has informal "huddles" (Merrill, 1979) and sit down meetings as often as they see it is necessary. As the teams gain experience working together their "team maturity" and individual competency increases. The need for formal meetings usually decreases and the "huddle" becomes the tool of choice. However, with each shift in the team membership or new wave of volunteers project team leaders will need to adjust their practices. Meal times are often spent sitting around a table discussing the week and days activities in an informal setting. A lot of last minute coordination and adjustment occurs in the morning as people scurry around grabbing breakfast, preparing lunch, and getting ready to head out for the days work.

These "huddles" and team meetings are the day-to-day setting in which the data is sifted and analyzed and action is planned as a part of the action research process.

Co-Country Directors Discussions with Project Team Leaders:

The Country Directors and Project Team Leaders stay in communication with each other as necessary. Most meet at least weekly to review challenges and accomplishments and plans and look for parts of the work that need to be adjusted.

Project/Event After Action Reviews:

From time to time a more formal after action review (Dixon, 2000) is conducted. The purpose of an after action review is to openly and non-defensively learn from a situation. It is meant to be a positive process that acknowledges but does not dwell on deficiencies. It is a setting in which every person from worker to leader to big boss are equals and have an equal obligation to appreciatively contribute, listen, think, and learn. The focus of the process is to answer these core questions:

- What did we set out to accomplish?
- What did we actually achieve?
- What went well?
- Why?
- How could we do more of that?
- What could have gone better?
- Why?
- What could we improve for next time?

While Pete Sorenson was in Guatemala this summer he conducted such a review with the volunteer team that had participated in stove building in Chicacau. The group of about 15 people had traveled for 6 hours each way on the “chicken busses” to get to the site where the stoves would be built. It was exhausting and the build conditions were not the best.

The AAR was conducted a couple of days after the trip. The group was anxious to talk about their experience. Since we had built four stoves and different people had been participating in different aspects of each build none of us had the whole picture of what had happened. The discussion evolved into a dialogue of learning where virtually every one was contributing observations and comments and many questions were asked and answered from volunteer to volunteer. The topics covered included every aspect of this experience and lead to lessons being highlighted that could be applied to other projects. Natalie Roe, La Reina de Las Estufas, told us that the AAR had been an extremely profound learning experience for her.

The AAR is a very effective action research tool. The authors have some AAR support materials that they would gladly share.

In Season Reflection and Coaching (Country Level):

Weekly Coaching/Problem Solving Telephone Calls between the Executive Director and Co-Country Directors:

Each week Jennifer Boehme Kumar, HELP's Executive Director, has a phone call with the Country Directors in each country to discuss the week's activities. These calls are information exchanges and coaching sessions. Some of the discussion is mundane and routine, but most of it focuses on critical issues and opportunities and how to make forward progress. Over the years this weekly call has become a critical element in weaving the organization together with learning together, making adjustments, and assessing results. It mirrors the action research process.

Weekly Country Reports:

In addition to the weekly phone call each pair of Country Directors creates a written weekly report. Life in country is fast paced, hectic, and at times chaotic. It can be easy to get caught up in the dynamism of the flow of events and not stop to gather data and reflect. By committing the week's activities to paper the country directors are pushed into carefully gathering and documenting data, analyzing it for trends and patterns, and reflecting on it for opportunities and places where a nudge here or a nudge there can make a difference. The report preparation process also creates a level of follow through and accountability that lead to constructive improvements.

Development work is a process of constant adaptation and improvisation. But there also needs to be a rudder in the water so that a course is loosely charted and followed. The weekly phone call and report are key mechanisms and tools for doing that.

The reports are also a critical communications mechanism that conveys information to the other Country Directors, the Executive Director, and the Board of Directors. This data gathering, analysis, reflection, and improvement are steps in the action research/service learning process.

Executive Director and Board Member Visits to Each Country Each Year:

Each year either the Executive Director, Board members, or both visit the countries and projects. The purpose is to meet with volunteers and Country Directors, NGO Leaders, and the people we serve. Additionally, when we make these trips, we go out to work on projects. There is a lot of discussion and coaching that takes place. In the visits the reinforcement of mission, purpose, values, and approach to the work are emphasized.

There is also a component of motivation. Pep talks, clearly communicated appreciation and deep listening to the experience the volunteers are having are important parts of the visits. This year Board members Janet Tanner went to Uganda and Pete Sorenson went to Guatemala and El Salvador. Both came back with the observation that our volunteers are amazing people doing amazing work. We also came back with "sneakers and sandals on the ground" fodder for our board level action research process.

After Season Reflection, Learning, and Feed Forward (HELP International as a Whole Level):

Annual Reports for each country:

Each pair of Country Directors files a detailed Country Annual Report that is to be turned in during September of the year. The data gathering, analysis, and reflection required to complete this report is a big as well as rewarding task. The report becomes an historical record of the organization and a diagnostic tool for changes and adjustments that must be made to the effort in each country and in the HELP approach overall.

Board of Directors Working Sessions & Board Meetings:

In the Board of Directors off site and meeting just held on 29 through 31 August 2007 we have taken several actions as we have learned from the years experience and reflected forward in the activities we anticipate doing next year and into the future. This is the "action research feed forward process" where we deliberately tease out and apply learning from the current and previous years to adjust our approach to the next year.

This year the Board has decided to experiment with an intensive two day training session for all volunteers before they leave the US. We are in the design process of that session as we write.

We are also designing learning materials on at least two topic areas based on the experience of our volunteers and the needs of our partner NGOs. The two topics are Microcredit lending and action research. We need to do a better job at being rigorous about our action research and we have found several NGOs that need Microcredit lending support that we are not currently prepared to offer. But we will have it ready by next summer!

We will also draw more broadly on the experience and talents of several of our supporters and contributors on whom we have not previously called. Warner Woodworth will also have several projects for his students in his classes to work on that will support this training effort.

There are several key instructional and learning design issues associated with the training. What is the content information that people need? What delivery format should we use? How should the training be delivered? Who will design the training? Who will deliver the training? The topics evolve over the years. The learning from each year is factored into the design of the training content (Action Research Feed Forward).

NGO Partner Relationship Evaluations:

Periodically we need to evaluate the relationships that we have with each NGO partner organization. In the past we have been rather informal about these reviews. To get the most out of the reviews we need to tighten up this process and build in a more rigorous action research approach to partner relationship development.

Section 8 - Example of Action Research & the Application of What We Learned – One Body of Work: Estufas (Stoves)!

One of the most difficult health problems in the developing world is respiratory disease caused by the inhalation of smoke and particulate matter from cooking fires in peoples homes. This indoor air pollution problem also has a disproportionate impact on women and children who are the ones cooking over and playing around the fires.

For more than a decade non-profit and educational institutions have been working on viable solutions to this problem. Using simple technology adobe, concrete, and metal barrels have been used to build serviceable, cost effective stoves for both cooking and heating. The stoves help prevent the crippling effects of respiratory problems, which in turn contribute to poverty and unfulfilled human potential.

The adobe stoves cost virtually nothing ($6 USD for the chimney vent), use less wood, allow for more variety in cooking, come up to cooking temperature more quickly, and save time for the women who generally do the cooking. Additionally we were told this year that they are easy to repair if they crack. You just put another layer of mud on the top. If it cannot be repaired you just break it apart and build a new one.

Our experience with stoves began in 2000 in Peru when one of our volunteers was involved in building adobe stoves as he worked with one of our partner organizations.

In 2002 the Board of Directors, Board of Advisors, Staff, and Country Directors visited a health clinic in La Liberdad, El Salvador. The Director of the clinic said that the biggest health issue they treated at his clinic was respiratory problems. These problems were virtually entirely due to smoke inhalation from preparing food over open fires inside homes. He said the disproportionate impact on women and children was frightening and discouraging.

In 2004 our staff and country directors re-discovered information about stoves made out of adobe and begin to build a few with partner organizations in Central America.

In 2006 we made a concerted effort to prepare for stove building before going to Guatemala and arranged with partner organizations to have an ongoing stove project throughout the summer. We discovered the “ripple effect.” In Guatemala HELP Volunteers build 14 adobe stoves with villagers and non-profit partners. The villagers and NGO Partners went on to build over 150 stoves.

Also in 2006 one of our Country Directors in Uganda, David Nieman, discovered a need for stoves in two of the schools in which the volunteers were serving. The staff at the schools fixed lunch each day for the children. It took a lot of wood to cook food over an open fire. David sent an urgent e-mail to our Executive Director, Jennifer, for instructions on how to build stoves. The Help Volunteers then went on to design and build two stoves with three cooking chambers, much larger than any we had done before. The stoves were put into use as soon as they had dried. When our volunteers returned in 2007 they found that the stoves were still in use and working well! Both cooking time and wood consumption had decreased significantly as a result of the stoves being used.

In 2007 the “ripple effect” is alive and well! In Guatemala HELP Volunteers taught stove building and built stoves with villagers and NGO Partners in 21 communities donating 634 man-hours of labor. At last count the villagers have gone on to build over 350 stoves. Part of the joy of the stove project is that it is a classic story of peer leadership and temporary project teams with fluid membership.

Each year our experience with the stoves is an action learning project as we adapt what we are doing to the needs of each community and family we are serving. The ability of the team members to learn from and with each other, our NGO Partners, and the villagers is a hallmark of how action research is a critically valuable tool for improving both effectiveness and efficiency.

The use of the After Action Review in Guatemala this summer was a great boost to the action research process. The AAR created the dynamic of having the whole group thinking together to create improvements and do so in a way that creates learning and improvement rather than criticism and defensiveness. The next evolution in the use of the AAR in our stove project will be to increase participation by involving NGO partners and villagers in the deliberations.

At the conclusion of each year we take what we have learned during the year and feed it forward so that the project can be more successful the next year. Before the 2008 season we will do more research on what works and prepare to move forward in new ways.

Section 9 - Summary of Insights about the Tools and Mechanisms of the Action Research and Service Learning Processes:

As we are practicing action research and service learning we have identified three levels of application of the tools, methods, and approaches.

Micro-Organizational Role:
The micro-organizational role of action research is to create a body of insight and understanding with which to guide a specific project or intervention toward greater success. This might be called a day-to-day use of action research to guide and discover the path forward.

The key tools we have identified at this level are temporary project teams, training for volunteers and Country Directors, daily and weekly project team meetings and huddles, and Country Director discussions with Project Team Leaders. Moving up a half level of analysis are several other tools that feed the micro role and creep up towards the macro role. They include project or event after action reviews, weekly coaching and problem solving phone calls, and weekly country reports. Up another half notch on the micro to macro scale is the Executive Director and Board Member Site Visits to each country. When we visit as ED or board members we get in the trenches to work with, sweat, laugh, cry, and celebrate with the volunteers. We strive to leave them a better person for our having been there. They always leave us better people for having had the blessing of working with them. But we are always looking for macro level implications of what we are doing that can be used to guide the organization into the future.

Macro-Organizational Role:
The macro-organizational role of action research is to create a body of insight, understanding, and experience which becomes a growing fund of intellectual capital (knowledge and know-how) to use in identifying and responding to the needs of people, families, communities, regions, nations, and the broader global community.

The key tools we use at this level are the annual reports from each country, the Board of Directors working sessions and board meetings, and NGO Partner Relationship Evaluations.

Human Development Role:
As we use each of the above mentioned tools, methods, and approaches there is an overlying assumption that we will have one eye and one foot in the task of supporting people in their walk toward fulfilling their potential. We find that volunteers who feel that they are contributing to the work and making connections with the NGO staffs and those we serve are happy, joyful, and fulfilled. Daily frustrations and adverse conditions melt away when people have a sense that they are constructively contributing to the lives of other people.

We are blessed with a dual human development task. In country we focus on serving and supporting our NGO partner staffs and the people we serve. At a macro scale and as our core purpose at HELP we are preparing and developing succeeding generations of volunteers to become life long social entrepreneurs with a commitment to the never-ending task of developing individual and collective human potential.

The tools, methods, and approaches of the action research and service learning processes are critical, primary levers with which we learn how to achieve these outcomes.

Broader Application:
You might recognize the names and structures of our tools and methods in the organizations you inhabit. These artifacts are common to most organizations. Temporary and permanent teams are implicit to the organizing process. Coaching discussions and written reports are common. The after action review is a valuable, broadly applied tool. Leaders have made site visits for centuries. So what is the distinction?

The distinction is the approach. When we adopt an action research, service learning approach we do so with a purposeful mindset that structures and focuses our activities toward achieving the dual outcomes of producing our product and service and deliberately learning and seeking improvement. We heartily recommend this approach as the soundest approach to creating value.

Section 10 - Examples of Current HELP International as a Whole Action Research Topics

Building a Grant Seeking Process:
We have a modest history of receiving grants. We are at an inflection point where we can choose to grow the organization significantly. We need to figure out what grant getting approach has worked in the past and learn from other organizations about their successful grant getting

approaches. We then need to create a process for seeking grants that can help support program expansion.

Improving on Our Track Record with Adobe (& Other) Stoves:
Our stove projects have worked well. Our improving track record is rewarding to see and experience. However, we want to be sure we are using the most current technology and designs that provide the most efficient solutions to the villagers and schools we serve. We need to canvas the globe to find out the latest and best technologies, designs, and practices. We also need to return to the villages where we have built stoves to find out how they are working and learn from the people that are using the stoves on a day-to-day basis.

Finding Partners and Developing Partner Relationships
As an NGO that works through the mechanism of partnering with other organizations we have several key questions that we must constantly review and answer. They are:

- How do we find and develop partners & projects?
- How do partner relationships and projects evolve?
- How can we teach that process to each group of volunteers each year?

We have within our community of partners, donors, volunteers, staff, alumni, and board members a large store of knowledge capital. We have not documented and learned from that knowledge capital with sufficient discipline. We need to create a project that will design a process for gathering and documenting this knowledge about partners and projects on an ongoing basis. Further we need to develop process models and tools as well as teaching materials so that we can train each succeeding group of co-country directors and volunteers on the best ways to find and develop partners and projects.

Section 11 - Weaknesses & Critique of HELP International

Discipline in Training and Application of Action Research:
Our use of action research has not been disciplined enough to achieve the potential benefits it offers. We have not done sufficient training and follow up to ensure that we are maximizing the learning value of the work we do. We need to do a better job of setting up a research agenda, structuring a research component for each project, build in the time for reflection and analysis that is necessary to tease out the learnings, and continuously feed them forward in the current project, the current year, and into future years.

Sufficiency of Training of Co-Country Directors and Volunteers Before They Leave the USA:
We have a reputation for training our volunteers well. But we see the weaknesses in our training. We frequently realize once the volunteers are in country that they are not prepared for part of the work they are doing. We realized this year that some of our younger volunteers do not have enough background in development, our own history, and in what practices work. We need to revamp our training, redesign the delivery of training, and create tighter follow up mechanisms in country.

Tightening the Focus of the Work on Developing Economic Self-Reliance, Eliminating Poverty, and Suffering:
Some of our historic strengths, such as supporting Micro-Credit Finance Institutions (MFI's) have receded into the background. We have taken on some activities that our NGO Partners have asked us to help with that are on the edge of the definition of the work we set out to do. We need to assess the nature of all of the projects and activities we are doing, compare them to our Vision and Values Architecture, and find the line of cause and effect between the projects and activities and the outcomes that we say we seek to achieve. We need to refocus on the work we are most capable of doing and that achieves the outcomes we seek to achieve, prepare ourselves better, and implement with tighter focus and accountability.

Section 12 - Implications for Other Campuses and Corporations – A Call to Serve & Learn

Industry has played an important role in each of the efforts of HELP described above. Among their various contributions are the following: Donated office space, board member participation, consultant interventions in helping design strategy, conducting NGO management training, and so forth. In several instances, these firms offered significant financial subsidies in getting these NGOs up and operating. At times, they were even willing to visit HELP's programs in Latin America, providing mentoring to U.S. and international staff, as well as encouraging partner NGOs of the Third World. In most instances, the result was of mutual benefit to all parties—business schools, MFIs, and corporations. The business schools were able to deliver innovative courses and action research opportunities that are increasingly demanded by MBAs and other students from other campus disciplines. Students enjoyed powerful "real world" experience in relieving human suffering. They also learned how to apply business models to global non-profit efforts. The performance of the MFIs and NGOs HELP worked with has been enhanced by the energy of young college students, as well as the depth of experience offered by corporate executives and consultants. In turn, the companies were able to advance their corporate social responsibility and sustainability objectives and gain a unique and valuable perspective on the grass roots human impact of the global economy.

To further improve partnerships, HELP's experience suggests the following best practices:

- The three sectors can learn much from each other. The goal becomes that of knowledge-sharing. Each party must discover what it has to offer and what it needs to learn.
- The size and scope of a project in terms of demands for time, energy, and funding ought to be negotiated up front. Generally they should create room for later add-ons as necessary during multiple rounds of discussion.
- The parties need to define what "success" means, so that they come to an agreement.
- There should be a climate of experimentation, a willingness to try things out and reject or retain learning as needed.
- The parties ought to anticipate points of dissention ahead of time and determine how problems and conflicts will be dealt with.
- Finally, organizations need to develop exit plans as to when, why, and what will happen over time.

For other business schools, the BYU experience also suggests several lessons. They include the fact that professors can actually do this kind of work with their students. It may be combined with research and field studies, as well as the teaching of courses, and it can develop long-lasting effects, not only for business students, but also in the lives of poor villagers of the Third World. Faculty need to think big and take risks. Their relationship with students needs to be participative, not like the formal control that often occurs in the traditional classroom. Based on HELP's experience in dealing with campus administrators, it is better to ask forgiveness from them, rather than seek permission for doing this kind of work.

Both business schools and socially responsible corporations can learn how to fight poverty effectively by understanding development theories, designing action research projects, generating internal motivation, and becoming champions of change. The NGOs that will be established can serve as mechanisms for growth and sustainability among the worlds poor.

Section 13 - Conclusion

The case of HELP International described in this paper is only a small portion of some 40 projects we have designed and implemented at BYU. Others that have been instituted, or at least strengthened by BYU student and faculty participation, plus alumni and outside consultants, include such NGOs as the Ouelessebougou-Utah Alliance that has been working in Mali, West Africa, for two decades, empowering 35,000 people in 72 villages. Enterprise Mentors launched a Microcredit program in Manila, the Philippines back in 1990 out of the author's course. Since then it has trained a million microentrepreneurs in five nations, and has raised more than $17 million. In another case, Eagle Condor performs similar work in northern Peru's urban areas, as well as rural communities in the Sacred Valley of the Inca near Machu Picchu. Another entity is Mentores para la Microempresa (MicroBusiness Mentors), which was started in 2003, to provide entrepreneurial training and $500 loans to members of Utah's impoverished Latino immigrant community adjacent to BYU. An additional NGO is the Academy for Creating Enterprise in Cebu, Philippines, which was started by the Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the Marriott School, along with several students. It trains Filipino young adults in a two month intense, live-in mini-boot camp, where students learn to write business plans, use laptop computers, and develop entrepreneurial start-ups. Still another example is that of Reach the Children, a New York-based NGO working in various African countries, focusing on education, orphanages, and other programs to improve the quality of life among impoverished children. One of the largest programs launched by BYU alumni, students, and faculty is Unitus, an MFI that has quickly risen to be one of the most successful microfinance deliverers in the world, with collaborative agreements in seven countries. Finally, beginning in 2005, the student-run NGO Empowering Nations was launched as a response to the horrific Asian tsunami by building 120 houses, establishing income-generating projects, and helping Thailand's coastal poor recover from the devastation. During that year, some 92 volunteers raised $200,000 and served at least a month each among the tsunami-impacted villages in Thailand. Since then, other Empowering Nations teams have been sent to Ghana, Panama, Peru, Kenya, and Paraguay to perform additional work.

The 16 largest of these NGOs, which were born within the BYU incubator of the past, are now having significant impacts. In 2006 alone, some $10 million in loan capital was raised through private donations. Approximately 220,000 microentrepreneurs were trained in simple business skills. By the end of 2006 these NGOs had a cumulative total in excess of 1.2 million clients worldwide. The future of these action research and service learning efforts appears very bright at HELP and BYU, in collaboration with corporate and NGO partners. We have a strong feeling is that this kind of success can be replicated among many more universities and corporations across the world as they tap into the skills and resources of consultants and global change agents.

"Never doubt that a small group of committed individuals can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."**--Margaret Mead**

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