

The CHOICE Model of Leadership Development

Self Developing District Model (SDDP)*

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Introduction: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals reflect a worldwide commitment to eliminate extreme poverty by the year 2030. Most of the discussion emphasizes what an important goal this is; however, few countries have found a way to actually achieve it. For over thirty years CHOICE Humanitarian has been testing a variety of approaches and strategies, seeking to determine the most cost-effective method for eliminating extreme poverty. Based upon years of experience in many different countries, CHOICE was invited in 2013 to field-test a program structured to eliminate extreme poverty in some 20 Village Development Councils (VDCs) in the rural district of Lamjung in the west-central region of Nepal.

Self Developing District Model in Nepal: The CHOICE Humanitarian Self-Developing District Program essentially eliminated extreme poverty in the southern portion of the Lamjung District in Nepal from 2013-2017, despite suffering a devastating earthquake midway through the 3 ½ year program. The keys to success were building trust between villagers and local facilitators, mentoring local leaders and families, and helping villagers base development efforts on their own priorities and core values. As individuals, villages, and government entities saw success and caught the vision, others joined in. In essence, CHOICE primed the pump and the local people made it happen. Details on the 3.5 year process can be found [here](#).

What makes this approach so unique is the way it has developed, almost as “a learning by doing” process among the CHOICE staff, the village leaders and the villagers themselves. Historically many people have assumed village communities are so disorganized and often so self-defeating in seeking to improve their quality of life that meaningful change is almost impossible. In contrast, CHOICE sees them with much latent potential waiting for the opportunity to bring themselves out of extreme poverty. The CHOICE model includes some twelve components or principles, uniquely structured to support the extreme poor to help themselves move into a better quality of life, becoming both producers and consumers and thereby helping the whole community to develop a better quality of life.

The word CHOICE has a special meaning reflecting a learning process where villagers must first come to believe they have Choices (options) that initially bring some level of Hope into their lives. This feeling of hope, reinforced by CHOICE-funded rural development facilitators (RDFs) assigned to work in these villages, gradually stimulates villagers to see new Opportunities they can pursue, which generates a sense of Inspiration (motivation)

and Collaboration (empowerment) that strengthens a community's commitment to building a society of greater equality of opportunity and some sense of Equity (greater equality). Let us now review the twelve components of the CHOICE Humanitarian model.





I. Pre-Program Components

(1) District Approach: Rejecting both the traditional top-down approach primarily based upon central ministries and the bottom-up approach usually focusing on a few villages one at a time, we prefer to work between these two extremes, at the rural district level. This new approach, called the Self Developing District Program (SDDP), works in areas of some 50,000 to 100,000 people divided into a number of village development council (VDC) areas that collectively are large enough to provide the economies of scale, the market demand and a diversity of needed services to make this collection of communities economically viable and capable of creating their own sustainable quality of life system.

(2) Highly Qualified RDFs: The foundation of this approach requires a careful selection of rural development facilitators (RDFs) with what we call the five C's: competency, creativity, commitment, character, and compassion. Utilizing a comprehensive recruitment and selection process, a strong pool of applicants are vetted through a three-day orientation workshop, ensuring the RDFs have the skills, motivation, and compassion to work effectively with the poorest of the poor in a given community area. These recruits are given

three months of intensive training in the theories and practices of rural development, with an emphasis on the roles, responsibilities, interpersonal skills, and facilitative processes to develop trust and understanding with all the families in these various VDC areas.

(3) Base Line Data: One very innovative component is to place these RDFs as part of their training into two-member teams (one man and one woman), with each team responsible for interviewing all the families in the areas where they will be working. This strategy accomplishes three major purposes: First, each RDF will come to know each family in the VDC area where they will be assigned. Second, this helps the villagers to understand the purpose of the Self Developing District Program (SDDP) initiative in these communities. Lastly, it provides the baseline data needed to identify community members who are living in extreme poverty, and with additional surveys in subsequent two years, will allow us to measure how and why we are making progress. While many might assume this three-month interviewing process is a misuse of staff time, it has proved to be the key element in motivating formal and informal leaders to commit to working with the RDFs in helping the extreme poor families to bring themselves out of poverty.

II. First Year Components: Building Trust and Understanding

(4). Building Mutual Trust and Understanding: During the first year of the SDDP initiative, the next two components of the program are implemented as villagers in each VDC area are trained to identify and prioritize their major problem areas into one of the five dimensions of rural development: (a) education and adult literacy, (b) health and good nutrition, (c) income and enterprises, (d) environment and infrastructure, and (e) leadership and cultural enhancement. In this first year, the entire community is encouraged to participate in identifying, planning, funding, implementing and evaluating the projects they desire. This is a key first step in a process that generates both trust and understanding about what, how, and why the SDDP has been introduced.

5) Emphasizing Core Values: Another unique component of the SDDP is the way the RDFs invite village families to identify the cultural traditions and core values perceived to be important in their communities. Especially interesting during this first year are the efforts of the RDFs to help villagers to identify the formal and informal leaders that they trust and respect the most, listing those qualities of leadership that are considered most important (integrity, service, kindness, and compassion, etc.). During the next two years, as the awareness increases as to why core values are important, villagers begin to take responsibility to help the extreme poor bring themselves into a better quality of life.

6) Expeditions: Over this first year, CHOICE also organizes expeditions where donors and supporters actually visit these villagers, working side-by-side. These expeditions help fund needed projects that benefit the whole community. This process also cements a relationship of trust and cooperation between the villagers, RDFs and CHOICE donors. Encouraging donors to visit program sites increases understanding as to how the program works and helps villagers to realize they are not alone.

III. Second Year Components: Institution Building and Introduction to Extreme Poverty Elimination

7) Gender Equality Leadership Training. The seventh component starts in the second year when villagers in each VDC area are invited to select 20 women and 20 men they trust and respect, who would benefit from an eight-week leadership training course: a) in principles of good governance (accountability, transparency, inclusive participation, human rights and

citizen responsibilities, b) in the principles and skills of **results-based management** structured to improve the implementation of projects and programs, helping villagers understand the differences between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact, and c) helping these first 40 villagers to understand how and why adherence to core values strengthens leadership legitimacy (trust and respect). RDFs have often mentioned in their reports that training this many women has had a revolutionary impact on how and why total communities became committed to helping the extreme poor take themselves out of poverty. This kind of training requires at least one year before people are ready to move ahead independently.

8) Building Networks and Partnerships (Importance of Leveraging). All during the first two years, RDFs work closely with villagers in finding ways to build partnerships and networks of collaboration with individuals and organizations in the three sectors of society: a) public sector (national, regional and rural district level government agencies), b) private sector (corporations, enterprises and business organizations, and c) social sector, (foundations, national and international NGOs, universities, and other non-profit donors). This ability of VDC leaders to leverage their own limited resources by networking and establishing partnerships is the key to the SDDP initiative becoming sustainable. Note from the chart below how CHOICE during the first ten years (2004 to 2013) provided over fifty percent (54.6%) of the budget. In the next two years (2014 to 2015), CHOICE, using the SDDP strategy, was only required to provide a little over twenty percent (21.7%) of the budget. With training from the CHOICE facilitators, village leaders, through their own networking and partnerships, were able to generate nearly 80 percent of the budget spent.

(9) Village-Controlled Cooperatives (Savings and Entrepreneurship Training) This ninth component encourages every family to participate in a monthly savings program, complete a six-week training program in entrepreneurship, develop their own business plans and obtain an enterprise loan from the cooperative or a local savings and loan bank. This savings and entrepreneurship building program is introduced in the first year and strengthened in the second year. However, it is in the third year that local economic development (villager-developed enterprises and other income generating activities) become the dominant emphasis of the SDDP initiative. One new innovation recently established in Nepal was a Market Information Sharing Program where many farmers used their mobile phones to start new businesses as they shared information on the levels of supply and demand for products and services in different communities. This was the beginning of an economic boom in those VDC areas and helps explain how many in extreme poor were able to move into a better quality of life.





IV. Third Year Components: (Formalized Community-Based Extreme Poverty Elimination Program and Establishment of District-Level Planning Council)

10. Formal Commitment to creating “Communities of Compassion”. While this commitment to eliminate extreme poverty is first introduced and strengthened during years one and two, it is during the third year where the most progress is made. First, as all the families in a VDC area begin to appreciate how helping the extreme poor move from being welfare recipients to fully functioning producers and consumers, something magical happens as the upper and middle poor begin to help the extreme poor move out of extreme poverty. Especially interesting has been the willingness of the 40 women and 40 men trained in each VDC area during the second year to formalize their villages as “communities of compassion”. It is within this tenth component that many middle and upper families have worked directly with clusters of 3-4 extreme poor families at a time, showing them how to start their own enterprises, encouraging other villagers to buy products from the extreme poor, and even to guarantee some loans so extreme poor could qualify for a loan. Working with local banks, a system of collective collateral allows even the extreme poor with no

collateral to receive cooperative and bank loans. During this period, a competition is established to see which VDC areas have the largest decrease in the percentage of families living in extreme poverty. For example, in Nepal, by the end of the second year (December 2015), nearly 850 of the 1800 extreme poor families had moved up into middle and/upper poor, mostly through starting their own enterprises or qualifying for better-paying jobs.

Please note: Many organizations tend to establish second and third-year activities beginning in the first year. Such short-cut approaches invariably fail to generate the sense of ownership and local leadership commitment needed for the process to be seen as theirs and not the outsiders--a lesson CHOICE has learned from past mistakes. It takes at least three years before village leaders really begin to see how they can take responsibility for their own development.

11. Large Scale Enterprise Development: During the second and third year of the SDDP, CHOICE continues to seek investment opportunities from large corporations and social impact investors willing to work in areas like hydro-electric projects, trekking and tourism, essential oils, and many other income-generating activities. As village leaders are trained by CHOICE RDFs, villagers are now prepared to negotiate directly with large companies that have a commitment to help the extreme poor move into a better quality of life. While historically middle-men paid very low subsistence wages to poor farmers, with the involvement of CHOICE, many of these local merchants are now willing to participate in this program. This eleventh component of the CHOICE model has a huge potential for ensuring participating farmers are paid a salary that can bring them out of poverty and generate funding a source that ensures the sustainability of the CHOICE Humanitarian program both in Nepal and in other countries. It is for this reason that CHOICE is confident that the final 950 extreme poor families first identified in the Fall of 2013 will by June 2017 be free of the scourge of extreme poverty

12. Formalize District Planning Councils: From the beginning of CHOICE's three-year SDDP initiative, all families participating in this program will understand that the CHOICE commitment will be limited to three years. It is emphasized that while the CHOICE model is at least a ten-year process, CHOICE staff will only be available on a full-time basis during the first three years to focus on identifying the extreme poor and to help bring those in extreme poverty up to an equal playing field, earning at least \$2.00 a day, and thus able to participate together with middle and upper poor on a more equal footing. This is the goal of the "Communities of Compassion" initiative. The fourth phase of the CHOICE model (continuing often another 5-7 year period or more) is to see all the participating VDCs become what we are calling "Communities of Development". The establishment of a Rural District Planning Council requires a membership of at least one man and one woman from each VDC area. Because all these leaders will have been trained in good governance, results-based management, and have learned to leverage their own resources, all the participating VDC areas should now be in a position to function quite independent of CHOICE, to network and partner with marketing systems, using value chains between local farmers and regional, national and international markets, plan and help implement programs and projects that will improve the quality of life for all the families in the area, and finally to link these VDC areas to a number of larger enterprises (national and international) that provide employment opportunities and income-generating activities, allowing most if not all families in these areas to move out of the broader forms of general poverty. While this may

not be true in other countries, the cost of the SDDP to involve some 13,000 families in Nepal to participate in eliminating extreme poverty in their communities was roughly \$33 per family per year or \$100 for the 3 years. This was largely possible because the villagers were able to leverage CHOICE's funds by a factor of five.

See the [Four Phases of a Self-Developing District Program](#)

See the [12 Components of a 10 Year Strategy](#)

***Future Activities of Replication in Other Countries:** CHOICE Humanitarian has empirically confirmed that the CHOICE model of twelve components is capable of helping people in extreme poverty move themselves into a better quality of life. We are now excited to replicate this model in other countries while recognizing such replications must be adapted and modified to reflect the political, economic, and social realities of these other countries. Read the 18-Month Progress Report from this project.



Village Model

The CHOICE Leadership Model of Development is a five-step, cyclical process that rural communities learn to use as an impetus for change and a method for achieving ongoing community-wide progress. Beginning with stages of self-assessment and organization, the model walks villagers through action planning and project execution to structured evaluation and the celebration of a job well done. Ultimately, the model leads villages within a given

Self-Developing

area to collaborate as a district, linking their efforts in common governance and economic development, more quickly and effectively reducing poverty and increasing quality of life.

Our Leadership Model of Development is holistic and integrates six core areas: economic development, health, education, environment, gender equality, and cultural preservation. Projects are a vehicle used to organize communities and mobilize resources to create lasting change and a solid foundation on their path towards self-reliance.

Step One: Qualifying the Village

Identify Leadership

- Natural Leaders
- Political Leaders

Assess Attitude

- Willingness
- Commitment
- Unified Voice

Review Assets

- Human Capital
- Economic Power
- Infrastructure
- Network

Step Two: Building the Team

- Guided Village Self-Evaluation
- Leadership Training
- Village Organization
- Long-Term Strategy
- Partnership

Step 3: Action Plan

- Focus on the Priority
- Prepare Project Proposal

- Build in Sustainability
- Assign Responsibilities
- Mobilize Local Resources
- Network Outside Resources

Step 4: Execution

- Launch Project
- Mentor Project Managers
- Oversee Committee Work
- Manage Work Teams
- Coordinate Project Materials Delivery
- Plan for Sustainability
 - Technical Training
 - Maintenance
 - Financial Viability

Step 5: Celebration and Learning

- Celebrate Completion
- Evaluate Project Outcomes
- Evaluate Overall Standard of Living Increase
- Assess Sustainability
- Evaluate Human Capacity Increases
- Prepare for Next Priority