



## Faith Communities: The Untapped Resource for Development

### Engaging, Equipping, and Mobilizing Untapped Resources

**C**eleste doesn't know much about foreign aid or development, but she's an expert on hunger, stigma, and disease. Sitting alone on a hand-woven mat in the African sun, Celeste is covered with lesions, having been expelled from her village due to her HIV-positive status and waiting for death.

Down the road, a local church resonates with the sound of 50 people singing, clapping, and dancing. The pastor preaches passionately to his small congregation about Jesus' call to care for the poor and hurting in His name. A church member leaves the exuberant worship service and makes her way toward Celeste's mat under a tree. Soon, Celeste will feel the volunteer's soothing touch, receive needed medications from a church-based clinic or a government hospital linked to the local congregation, and begin to rebuild her life.

This church member does not have a medical degree—in fact, she is just learning to read and write—but she understands community

development because her church has provided extensive, yet simple, training in how to be a volunteer community health worker. The humble church member calls herself a “Community PEACE Servant.” She represents more than 3,000 volunteers in the Western Province of Rwanda who are improving health, influencing development, reducing poverty, and changing the world, one family at a time. More than 22,000 home-health visits will be made in this rural region this month because churches are taking the lead. Empowered U.S. and indigenous churches are connecting with each other and partnering with governments and other organizations to engage and equip ordinary people in local churches to actively address development issues in the lives of real people everywhere.

### Defining the Problem

If the U.S. public is to be engaged in development issues, global problems—as well as practical solutions—need to be communicated and discussed in ways that make sense to the average person. The PEACE Plan aims to do just that, by identifying



Indian nursing students hold a candlelight vigil to mark World AIDS Day in Amritsar on December 1, 2008. In the 25 years since the first case was reported, AIDS has killed 25 million people, and infected 40 million more. | AFP Photo: Narinder Nanu

the development issues that affect billions of people—the global “giants”—and proposing real-world answers.

The first global giant is *spiritual emptiness and lack of reconciliation*. Billions of people live without hope and purpose. They have little to live on and even less to live for. Their lives lack meaning. Conflict—on a personal, as well as tribal, national, and global level—is an ever-present reality. Millions of men and women who are searching for spiritual hope and reconciliation have made *The Purpose Driven Life*, translated into more than 100 languages, a bestselling book for 10 years. People are hungry for purpose and reconciliation at all levels.

The second global giant is *egocentric leadership*. Egocentric leadership cares more about maintaining popularity than eliminating poverty, more about status and success than serving

others, more about winning than wiping out illiteracy, more about preserving power than preventing diseases, more about controlling people than caring for them. There is a severe shortage of servant leadership on our planet. Instead, many self-centered and even corrupt leaders in both public and private sectors use their power to serve themselves instead of for the good of those who need help the most.

The third global giant is *extreme poverty*. Three billion people—half of our world—live on less than \$2 a day. More than one billion live on less than \$1 a day. One-sixth of the world’s population lives in slums and in grinding, dehumanizing poverty.

The fourth global giant is *pandemic disease*. Although a cure is yet to be found for the 33 million people infected with HIV/AIDS worldwide, billions of others still suffer from diseases we

learned how to cure or prevent in the 19th and 20th centuries. Even though Teddy Roosevelt was the U.S. President when an approach to end malaria was developed, 300 million people will suffer from malaria this year. Three thousand children will die today—and every day—because of a simple mosquito bite.

The fifth global giant is *illiteracy and a lack of education*. Half of our world is functionally illiterate, with 70% of the population members of primarily oral cultures. What hope is there for these fellow human beings in the 21st century's global economy if they cannot read and write?

### **The PEACE Plan**

The PEACE Plan's approach to these five Global Giants is simple but effective: plant and partner with churches that promote reconciliation, equip servant leaders, assist the poor, care for the sick, and educate the next generation. While some may scoff at this kind of simplicity, the need for greater engagement from the faith community in these gigantic development issues begs for a simple framework that compels and facilitates action.

The PEACE Plan frames problems in accessible terms, summarizes the challenges and opportunities, and offers a process whereby ordinary people in churches all around the world can act in their own communities while working together to provide human resources and human capital. It connects U.S. churches to indigenous churches through a network that mobilizes ordinary people who would not otherwise be involved in development.

The PEACE Plan emerged in 2003 from Rick Warren, Founder and Senior Pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. With a 23-year history of training global church leaders in 162 countries, Pastor Warren became convinced that global transformation was going to happen only if local churches and congregations were activated,

engaged, and equipped. He believed that local churches and indigenous faith congregations were the keys to radical change.

Attempts by the public and private sectors have failed to address adequately these global giants. Even the best efforts of the United States, the United Nations, philanthropic organizations, and multinational corporations have not been enough. But there is hope for change: A grassroots partner is already in place around the world—the faith community.

### **Accessing Every Solution: The Faith Community as a Surprising Partner in Development**

Global crises require accessing and engaging every equipped partner. Just as a stool requires three legs to endure as a successful seat, the best efforts to meet global development needs require contributions from three sectors to endure as a successful intervention: public (governments), private (businesses), and—the missing component—faith (local congregations).

The first sector, government, represents an agenda-setting and permission-giving role. Government policy, regulations, and requirements can make it easy or difficult to help those in need. But with increasingly unstable global economies and shifts in administration, no government can adequately or consistently tackle the world's development problems.

Business, the second sector, provides the expertise and capital particularly needed to address the global giants of poverty, disease, and illiteracy. If money alone were the solution, however, we would have seen an end to these crises long ago. Expert knowledge and skill are limited in scope and require a system of distribution.

Even if every dream imagined by USAID and other global organizations and sovereign countries

were fully funded, the question would remain, “How will the resources be distributed? Who can originate, collaborate, and implement the plan?”

The third sector—the faith community—is the final leg that provides the stability.

The only organizations with large enough volunteer labor forces and distribution networks to tackle the global giants are the Christian church and other faith communities—the grassroots fellowships found in every community and village around the world. With billions of members distributed in nearly every community in the world, this network of congregations is a sleeping giant waiting to be mobilized.

## The Church’s Unique Resources

What sets the church and other faith communities apart from other relief organizations?

First, *the church has a history of caring*. The church is motivated by the central teaching of Jesus Christ to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). This mandate to love goes beyond altruism. It is well documented that 40%–60% of all health-care institutions and schools around the world were first started by people of faith. And in most villages, congregational leadership is trusted far more than any government or NGO staff.

These are difficult economic times, and the mood of some U.S. citizens is reflected in a recent Gallup poll reporting that 59% of Americans favor cutting U.S. foreign aid.<sup>1</sup> When asked to estimate the percentage of the U.S. federal budget allotted to foreign aid, the polled subjects’ median estimate was 25%. When asked what they considered to be an appropriate level of spending for foreign

aid, they responded 10%.<sup>2</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the United States spent only 1% of the federal budget on foreign assistance<sup>3</sup>—or perhaps as much as 2.6%, if one looks at the amount as a share of only the discretionary portion of the budget.<sup>4</sup>

While sluggish and stagnant economies, austerity measures, and political reality are placing pressure on foreign aid spending, faith communities continue to ignite passion for assisting others in need. Their compassion remains steady in the face of uncertain economic times because of their deep convictions about caring for the most vulnerable among us.

Second, *churches have the largest cadre of volunteers*. The greatest untapped resource in global development sits in the pews, dances in the aisles, or gathers in some form in every church or faith congregation around the world. The global church is larger than any government or nation. If just half of the people in churches worldwide were mobilized, there would be a contribution by more than 1 billion volunteers. The U.S. church is uniquely poised to equip and empower ordinary, average people to address health and education needs worldwide through training and mentoring volunteers in local churches abroad.

Most models of church-to-church engagement have focused on sending only financial resources. For transformation to occur, however, volunteers from all over the world will need to cross borders to assist one another. Additionally, instead of using a transactional form of engagement through projects that leave people in local churches doing

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1 Frank Newport and Lydia Saad, “Americans Oppose Cuts in Education, Social Security, Defense,” *Gallup/Politics*, January 26, 2011, [www.gallup.com/poll/145790/americans-oppose-cuts-education-social-security-defense.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/145790/americans-oppose-cuts-education-social-security-defense.aspx), accessed March 30, 2012.

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2 “American Public Opinion on Foreign Aid,” World Public Opinion. org Questionnaire, November 30, 2010, [www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/nov10/ForeignAid\\_Nov10\\_quaire.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/nov10/ForeignAid_Nov10_quaire.pdf), accessed March 29, 2012  
3 “U.S. Foreign Economic and Military Aid Programs: 1980 to 2009,” U.S. Census Bureau, The 2012 Statistical Abstract, Table 1298, [www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s1298.pdf](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s1298.pdf), accessed March 29, 2012.  
4 Newport and Saad, “Americans Oppose Cuts.”



nothing while U.S. volunteers offer services, a new model that empowers the local community church member is needed. A U.S. volunteer will teach, support, and enable a person in a local church to achieve results that validate the local church as the hero, *not* just the individual.

Third, *churches can provide universal distribution*. There are more local churches scattered around the world than all the franchises of Starbucks, Walmart, and McDonalds combined.<sup>5</sup> The church has survived in the face of wars, famines, floods, and nuclear bombs. It is present in refugee camps, prisons, jungles, and dungeons. The faith community is both the oldest entity and ubiquitous; in many parts of the world, the church is the only civil-society infrastructure in existence at the grassroots level.

As we consider the global giants of spiritual emptiness, egocentric leadership, extreme poverty, pandemic disease, illiteracy, and a paucity of education, it is clear that a major hindrance to alleviating the suffering is a lack of dependable distribution channels. The problem is not a shortage of money. Money flows to good ideas. It's not a lack of medicine. We have medicines for all of the major diseases in the world. The problem is distribution. Even if a cure for HIV and AIDS were available tomorrow, distribution to those in need would be a hurdle of tremendous proportion because governments, businesses, and NGOs do not have the necessary grassroots network.

What then is the barrier to accessing the distribution network inherent in the faith community? We can only speculate, but perhaps there is a fear of working with churches and people of faith. But if people of faith—whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jew, or any other

faith—are required to set their religion aside in order to participate in humanitarian projects, then a great percentage of the world's population will be eliminated as links in this vital chain of distribution. Equal partners in a society must discover how to work for the good of all without expecting unanimity on every topic. We don't have to see eye-to-eye to work hand-in-hand.

## **The Faith Community as Mobilizers**

Communities of faith understand how to engage, equip, and mobilize their members as they gather weekly to worship. Historically, ordinary people in faith communities everywhere have been mobilized to contribute to relief and development efforts. Even if their attempts have not always been well informed, guided by best practices, or effective in their outcomes, improvement and progress were often the goal. Current undertakings in relief and development stand in contrast to past efforts in their size, scope, and effectiveness.

Advances in development approaches include those for child welfare. This is a natural interest for the faith community because we are commanded to care for orphans and widows. The church has accessed evidence-based data that demonstrate the deleterious effects of institutional care on children. As a result, it has become a significant opponent of institutional care and a mobilization leader for efforts to provide a legal mother and father for every orphan, changing the children's status from orphan to son or daughter. Adoption is encouraged by a family in the country of origin, and by opening doors for international adoption.

Consider Saddleback Church's goal to send members to every nation on earth with the message of God's grace. More than 14,000 of its own members—all self-funded—have gone to 194 countries through The PEACE Plan. No other single entity has ever mobilized so many unpaid,

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<sup>5</sup> Beliefblog, "My Take: Church is world's most powerful weapons against AIDS," blog entry by Rick Warren, July 3, 2011, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/07/03/my-take-church-is-worlds-most-powerful-weapon-against-hiv-aids/>, accessed April 17, 2011.

self-supporting volunteers to as many countries in less than a decade.<sup>6</sup>

The lessons of the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and of Hurricane Katrina are noteworthy. It quickly became clear that the Christian community mobilized their churches, both local and from outside of the area; provided significantly more volunteers; and stayed longer than other organizations—including well known ones like the Red Cross. Churches and their volunteers are still at work in these areas, long after the initial disasters took place. Anyone can help, but faith communities give hope: Our job is never finished.

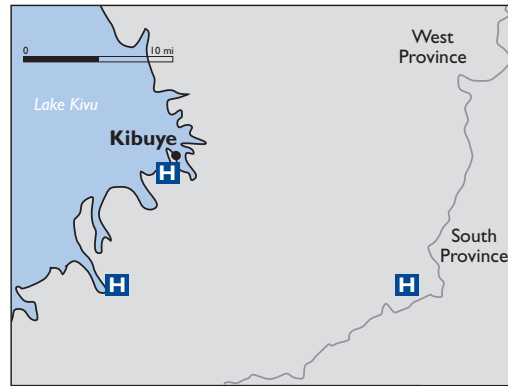
## A Look at Rwanda

Steven Radelet, in *Emerging Africa: How 17 Countries Are Leading the Way*,<sup>7</sup> has attributed development success to five fundamental changes that are at work: the rise of democracy, implementation of sensible economic policies, improved relations with the international community, the spread of new technologies, and a new generation of leaders.

A sixth component is alive and well in Rwanda. With a network of hundreds of churches, a PEACE model of partnership and empowering people in local churches is effecting change.

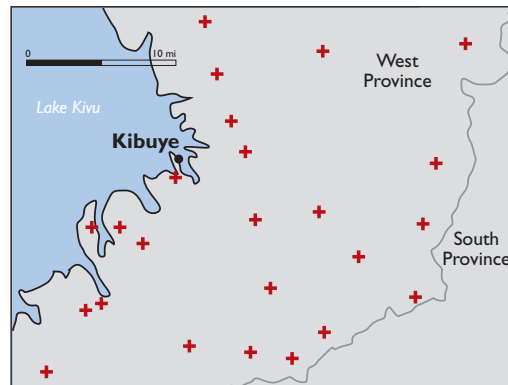
While others argue that conflict, harmful economics, poverty, hunger, and disease pose substantial development problems, they simply cannot be resolved with money or volunteers alone; Rwanda seems to be finding a way to thrive by mobilizing volunteers.

Using Rwanda as an example, the illustrations at right graphically depict the potential that the faith communities have to deliver much-needed development efforts—in this case, basic health care. The inequity in development is partially



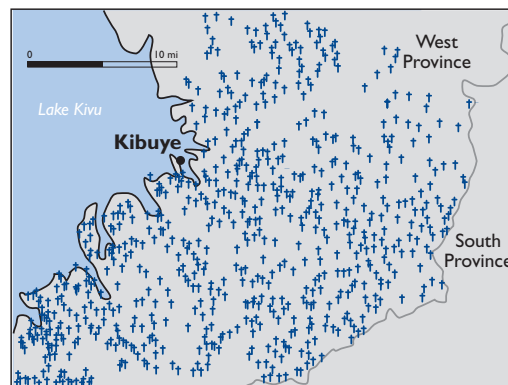
### AREA HOSPITALS

In Rwanda's Western Province there are three hospitals serving 500,000 people.



### AREA HEALTH CENTERS

Medical coverage is expanded through approximately 20 health clinics.



### PROTESTANT & CATHOLIC CHURCHES

The potential for accessible primary health care is vastly improved by engaging more than 728 churches.

6 *To Every Nation: The Story of One Church Going to Every Nation* by 2010. (Saddleback Church, 2010) iv, vii.

7 Steven Radelet, *Emerging Africa: How 17 Countries Are Leading the Way* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2010).

defined by lack of access to resources. When faith communities are engaged, access becomes optimized and obtainable, even in the most rural areas.

The Western Rwanda Healthcare Initiative has been a startling example of the power of engaging the faith community in development. At the heart of the effort is The PEACE Plan at work in the community, mobilizing ordinary church members to engage in addressing and solving local problems.

Beginning with two U.S. church volunteers providing healthcare training to 28 Rwandan church volunteers in July 2008, the initiative has grown to 3,000 Community Healthcare Volunteers—with a trajectory of more than 7,000 volunteers by the end of 2012. Volunteers carry caseloads of seven homes each, to which they make regular home healthcare visits and, as appropriate, teach basic hygiene, distribute medication, and provide HIV teaching and referral. To date, 137,000 people have been positively affected through this local church program. Furthermore, this program is now being implemented in the other four provinces of Rwanda, ensuring a lasting and comprehensive influence on the health of the nation.

The reproducibility and scalability of this program is due to adherence to the “biological approach” set forth by Daniel Taylor and Carl Taylor of Johns Hopkins University:<sup>8</sup>

*The Biological approach not only seeks solutions adapted to cultural, economic, and ecological realities, but also supports those solutions so that they expand rapidly. It does require, however, changes in behavior that are atypical for most officials, experts, and donors; and an intentional enabling of community empowerment so that people can rise to their new opportunities.*

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Taylor-Ide and Carl Taylor, *Just and Lasting Change: When Communities Own Their Futures* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 61.

Church-based development excels in empowering communities because its holistic approach to training incorporates renewal in both mindset and behavior—the “biological” model of Taylor and Taylor applied.

This is not to glibly offer that the church can work alone. It does illustrate that equitable development requires access to care. Mobilizing the church and faith community to effect change is the method by which every person can most assuredly have access. In The PEACE Plan model, aid is based on ownership by the local church, with transparency and sustainability as keys to success.

## **Moving from Relief to Development**

U.S. churches do well at providing funds and advocacy for appropriate government financial aid allocation. They also give generously to causes in the developing world based on an apparent belief that funding will solve the problems they observe and about which they are passionate. What often gets missed is the immense influence and untapped resources that are alive and well in the global church community—and their ability to be an integral part of the solution to the global giants.

The PEACE Plan is redirecting these relief-focused efforts to positively affect and implement developmental strategies that empower local communities and bring fiscal responsibility and mutual accountability into play without being paternalistic. Instead of traditional relief measures, which are frequently externally driven and promote unsustainable dependency, development is advocated with a focus on long-term results. The PEACE Plan’s church-to-church training approach allows for contextualization and indigenous understanding of problems, and for enabling local communities to address their own development needs, while continuing to access and utilize the time, education, and resources within the American church.

The effort to move the American church from relief agents to catalysts in development is the distinction that sets apart The PEACE Plan from previous mission efforts. Instead of encouraging global churches to passively receive assistance for survival—assistance that often contributes to

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the dehumanization of the recipient and political corruption in the region—the faith-based community is now expertly engaging, equipping, and mobilizing people and resources to provide care while also advocating for appropriate U.S. policy and intervention.

### **The Church as a Critical Partner**

Every member of an American church or faith community has a role to play in global development. Engaging the time, resources, and expertise of ordinary church members in partnership with the global church is the core of the church's message—to utilize individual gifts for God's purposes in the world. Directing these gifts to effect development is simply a matter of connecting local U.S. churches and resources to empower and mobilize the people in churches globally to address development needs. ThePEACEPlan.com does just that, working to make these vital connections through its extensive church-to-church network.

Odeth, an engaged, equipped, and mobilized Rwandan Community Peace Volunteer, was

recently chosen as the spokeswoman for many of the other trained volunteers. She approached one of the lead trainers and told him that the group had decided to change its name. The trainer was apprehensive, uncertain if this was a sign of unhappiness within the volunteers. But his fears were alleviated as Odeth said, “We no longer want to be known as Community Peace *Volunteers*; we want to be called Community Peace *Servants*. A volunteer can quit anytime, but we're servants of God; we can't quit.”

Odeth—like millions of other dedicated members of faith communities around the world—is a powerful reminder of the strength, the vitality, the commitment, and the effectiveness of average men and women who become engaged in development where they live.

The hope and care that people like Celeste have received can be made available to the impoverished, ill, and hurting around the world by unleashing volunteers within the church. The local church and faith-based communities are critical partners in development, strategically poised to impact the world's most pressing problems—the global giants—through engaging, equipping, and mobilizing the untapped resources of the faith community.

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*The views expressed in this essay are their own, and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.*