

Community-Based Organizations:  
Making Positive Impacts for Disadvantaged Families in Nigeria

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## Introduction

In his book titled *Walking with the Poor*, Bryant Meyers a professor and lifelong activist dedicated to Christian relief and development work around the world, states that “poverty means different things to children and youth, to women, to the mentally and physically challenged, and to the old. To think and do well, we need to understand these differences and plan accordingly without increasing the poverty of the community through social fragmentation” (112-113). I have always been passionate about the welfare of children, but I am especially concerned about the welfare of children from disadvantaged or at-risk families. A disadvantaged person is usually classified as someone who does not enjoy the same rights or standard of living as the majority of people in their society either because they do not have access to basic amenities, or they cannot afford it. Because of the socio-economic conditions of disadvantaged families, there is a high possibility that children from these families will struggle in numerous aspects of their lives. These struggles are likely to cause them setbacks that might prevent them from succeeding at life in general. This is why children from disadvantaged families need some form of support or intervention. This support or intervention could be spearheaded by various entities such as governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, the church, a group of individuals etc.

For the purpose of this research, I have focused on community-based organizations. I chose Jubilee REACH (JR) as the primary location for my field work and Seattle Union Gospel Mission (SUGM) as my second location. They are both community-based organizations that provide services to disadvantaged families in the Bellevue and Seattle areas respectively. JR focuses on the children and in doing so helps their parents while SUGM focuses on the parents and in doing so helps their children. The purpose of my research was to find out if indeed

community-based organizations had any positive impact on the lives of the disadvantaged people groups that they serve. If yes, how much of a difference they made and what they were doing right. The outcomes from my research at JR and SUGM led me to arrive at my theory that without some form of intervention or support, disadvantaged people groups will continue to find it extremely difficult to thrive in life. My assumption is the driving force behind the project I have proposed for my community in Nigeria. In order to improve the prospects of children from disadvantaged families in Nigeria, it is necessary for community-based organizations to intervene when the children are young while at the same time, taking into account the vital role that their parents or guardians play in their lives. In this paper, I will propose a project run by a community-based organization intended to support disadvantaged families. This project proposal will address the context of the problem and the need that I am trying to meet, my planned intervention, the resources that will be required and where they will come from, how and by whom the project will be carried out, and the timeline for the implementation of the project.

### **Context of the Problem**

Before one can propose an intervention project for a people group, one must first know their need and in order to know their need, one must first understand the cause of the challenges that they face. Myers states that “our understanding of the causes of poverty also depends on where we start looking at poverty, and more important, where we stop looking” (133). My understanding of poverty was shaped at a very young age when I started noticing the vast differences between wealthy people and disadvantaged people in my community in Lagos, Nigeria. For instance, the difference in the neighborhoods that they lived in, the differences in the schools that their children attended, the differences in their consumption habits, the type of hospitals that they used and so on. As I got older, I quickly noticed a pattern. What I noticed was

that wealthy families remained wealthy and disadvantaged families remained underprivileged or became even more disadvantaged. More importantly, I noticed that children from disadvantaged families grew up and assumed the same socio-economic status as their parents. In turn, their children grew up and assumed the same socio-economic status as their parents and this wheel rotated generation after generation. This is what Ruby Payne in her book titled *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, defines as generational poverty: “having been in poverty for at least two generations” (47). There are numerous families in my community that are being impacted by generational poverty.

A family could be disadvantaged for various reasons. For instance, if the primary breadwinner(s) is a low-income earner, a single parent, not highly educated, a survivor of domestic violence, suffering health challenges, struggling with or recovering from substance abuse or is homeless (this list is not exhaustive). These factors could hinder a parent from making the necessary investments such as money or time, that their child requires in order to thrive in life. This is not to imply that all families that are affected by one or a combination of the factors mentioned above are disadvantaged. Rather, it is a family’s ability or inability to thrive despite these factors, that indicates if it is advantaged or disadvantaged. Advantaged families are in better positions to rise above the challenges that the mentioned factors present because they have access to the support resources that disadvantaged families do not have access to. As a result, children from disadvantaged families are more likely to face inhibiting challenges and barriers than children from advantaged families.

The \*Berry family is one of the disadvantaged families in my community. Aya Berry became a single mother while in secondary school. Due to the unplanned pregnancy, she could not complete her education because the Nigerian culture does not allow for unwed pregnant

teenagers to remain in school or even return to school after they have given birth. Therefore, Aya did not have the option of attending university. Without a university degree, she was unable to get a well-paying job, so she had to work low-income jobs in order to provide for her family. Because she did not complete her secondary school education, she could not assist her children with their schoolwork or even tell that they were struggling in school. Eventually, both her children dropped out of secondary school and now also have low-income jobs. They are struggling to make ends meet. Her son has a child of his own and cannot afford to pay for his education. Aya's socio-economic status played a huge role in the life of her children and their children.

During an interview, I asked Jubilee REACH's executive director, Randy Eng, about some of the challenges of the families that JR supports. He explained that "some parents are working really hard, but barely make enough to pay the rent, to pay for food, for utilities, to own a car or to pay insurance. With the cost of living so high on families, even a middleclass family can plunge into financial hardship and homelessness as a result of an illness or loss of a job" (Eng, personal interview). It is very challenging for many of these distressed families that JR supports. There is so much pressure because parents are working all those low-paying jobs and are not around, yet they are barely making it. He also stated that there is a lot of brokenness in the families that they serve. There are relational challenges within the home where parents don't get along and there is a lot of conflict and strife. In several cases the relationship is so broken that there is only one parent in the child's life, and this has a huge impact on the well-being of the child because that parent is working multiple jobs to make ends meet to provide for their family and so might not be present a lot of the time. As a result, the children in these homes, don't have the care and nurturing that they need from their parents or guardians. This is why the children

from these families are prone to isolation and depression. “We see those behaviors manifest in the schools with bullying. We deal with attempted suicides, we see assaults at a very young age: physical assaults, sexual assaults. We’re seeing drug use in the children as early as middle school all the way through high school. In some rare cases, we’ll see it in grade school” (Eng, personal interview). These challenges are not unique to the disadvantaged families in the United States.

The disadvantaged families in the community where my project is being proposed face similar challenges and these challenges ultimately affect their ability to lay a good foundation for their children. Like Myers points out, the poor “live in networks of relationships that do not work for their well-being” (15). I will use the disadvantaged families in Lagos to highlight this point. With a total surface area of approximately 923,768 square kilometers and an estimation of over 200.96 million inhabitants, Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and the 7<sup>th</sup> most populated country in the world. According to the World Population Review, “the entire population of Nigeria accounts for about 2.35% of the entire earth’s population. This means that about 1 out of every 43 people in the world call Nigeria their home” (author unknown). Located along the Atlantic Ocean, Lagos City in Lagos State is Nigeria’s largest city and Africa’s most populous city. It is also the commercial capital of Nigeria and home to Africa’s largest and busiest ports. The city bustles with a diversified economy in manufacturing, transport, construction, service, wholesale, and retail sectors, to mention a few. As a result, people from other parts of the country, especially the rural areas, flock to Lagos City in the hundreds of thousands to seek opportunities in order to improve their standard of living. The World Atlas website states that “according to Heinrich-Boll-Stiftung (HBS) Foundation research it’s the 7<sup>th</sup> fastest growing city in the world, with a population of 21 million ...” (Karuga). In as much as the growth of a city is a positive thing, this puts a strain not only on the city’s amenities but also on

its residents. In their book titled, *Social Entrepreneurship: What Everyone Needs to Know*, David Bornstein and Susan Davis state that “as the world has grown more urban and interdependent, the pace of change has accelerated. Today, our adaptive systems must keep pace” (12). Unfortunately, a lot of parents are finding it difficult to keep up with the accelerated pace of change. I will explain further why, below.

The city of Lagos is divided into two main sections: the mainland and the island. Both landmasses are connected by three different long bridges: Third Mainland Bridge, Eko Bridge and Carter Bridge. The Third Mainland Bridge is 10.5 kilometers long and used to be the longest in Africa until the 6<sup>th</sup> October Bridge was completed in Cairo, Egypt in 1996 (Onyeakagbu). The mainland is older than the island with a larger landmass and typically more affordable housing. The island consists of mostly newer modern buildings that cost a lot to buy or even rent and are largely occupied by corporate entities. In Lagos, many people whose offices are on the island are forced to live far away on the mainland because they cannot afford the cost of the residential houses that are close to their offices on the island. As a result, a lot of the mainland residents commute to the island for work. Because this is the case for many Lagos mainland residents, the commute to work every day could take between two to three hours and another two to three hours to commute back home after work. Most parents leave their homes before 5:00AM in order to get to their jobs on time. You can imagine what time they have to get up in the mornings to get themselves and their children ready for the day. At the close of business, if they manage to leave their offices at 5:00PM on the dot, they are lucky if they make it back to their homes before 9:00PM. In many cases, these parents have more than one job and work irregular hours so when they eventually get home, they are exhausted. They are too tired to muster the energy required to fully engage in quality time when their children are reporting about their day. Because these

parents are stressed and overwhelmed, they tend to be impatient with their children. This puts a strain on the parent-child relationship and causes tension in the home.

In addition to this, there is barely enough time between getting home and bedtime for parents to even help their children with schoolwork. If such a child is struggling academically or in other areas of their life, it is unlikely that the parent will be able to pick up on it on time or at all. If and when they do find out, despite the numerous jobs that they have, they cannot afford to pay for private tutors to coach their children outside school hours. During a Ted conference, education entrepreneur Karim Abouelnaga states, “in a typical middleclass or affluent household, if a kid is struggling, there’s a good chance that a parent or a teacher will come to their rescue even if they don’t ask for help. However, if that same kid is growing up poor and doesn’t ask for help, there’s a good chance that no one will help them. There are virtually no social safety nets available” (Abouelnaga). If these children struggle for too long without any help, there is a high possibility that they will be forced out of school. As a result, the children from these families feel alone, abandoned and even unloved and in order to get their parents’ attention, they tend to act out in different ways especially at school because this is where they spend most of their time. A child that is struggling at home is bound to struggle in school and vice versa. Disadvantaged families do not have access to the necessary resources that they require in order to improve their standard of living. This is why they need support.

### **Community’s Need**

It is a proven fact that child poverty affects every aspect of the child’s life: their health, performance in school, social and emotional well-being and so on. In their article titled “U.S Ratification of the CRC and Reducing Child Poverty”, Aber et al. write that “both poverty and near-poverty affect many specific features of children’s physical and mental health, cognitive



development and academic achievement, and social-emotional learning and development” (165). Needless to say, every aspect of a child’s life is affected by the socio-economic status of their parent(s). The need I am proposing to meet is helping children from disadvantaged families to succeed in life by reducing the undesirable effects caused by the negative challenges brought on by their parent’s socio-economic status. These include but are not limited to poor academic performance, bullying or being bullied, school drop-out, street violence, exposure to and use of illegal substances, incarceration, etc. This need can be achieved by meeting the child’s basic needs, promoting their development as an individual, or protecting their fundamental rights (Aber et al.).

One prominent way to promote a child’s development is to ensure that they have access to quality education. I observed that the families that use JR’s services do so especially because of the organization’s connection with the school system. These parents want a better life for their children and understand the importance of education for their children. A child without an education is denied the opportunity to have a chance at a good life. Reason being that lack of education reduces the possibility of securing any kind of well-paying job. Without such a job, a person might have to settle on one or multiple low-income jobs. Or worse, no job at all. This puts a strain not just on the individual and their family but also on the community and might eventually lead to the cycle of generational poverty mentioned above. In her book titled *Theories and Practices of Development*, Katie Willis states that:

Meeting the needs of the poor would not only help reduce poverty levels, but would also improve the education and skill levels of the population, with the concomitant potential for contributing to greater economic growth. In addition, as the poor get richer, their purchasing power rises, so benefiting domestic firms. (105)

When we empower children from disadvantaged families, we inadvertently empower their parents, their communities, their countries and ultimately the world. It is a ripple effect that everybody benefits from.

### *Proposed Intervention*

Myers states that “the way we understand the nature of poverty and what causes poverty is very important, because it tends to determine how we respond to poverty. Articulating what poverty is and what causes it helps us to determine the source of much of our understanding of what transformational development is and how it should be practiced” (14). Because I am aware of the dynamics that contribute to the hardships of the disadvantaged families in my community, I understand what transformational development for them should look like and how it should be practiced. In their book titled *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*, Tom Kelley and David Kelley state that “creativity comes into play when you have the opportunity to generate new ideas, solutions or approaches” (3). They also express that one of the qualities about most people with creative confidence is that “they are not passive observers” (115). The perceptions behind these two quotes are the concepts that drive the project that I am proposing. My community’s need gives me an opportunity to create new ideas that will address the well-being of children as well as their parents.

I am proposing a before- and after-school program called Lion Hearts, for primary school children in the Jakande community in Lagos, Nigeria. The mission of this program is to provide a safe space where parents can enroll their children before and after school hours so that they can be positively engaged through various activities while they learn useful life lessons and skills. The vision is to create the possibility of a better future for children by providing access to resources and equipping them with basic tools that are necessary to help them to be the best

versions of themselves so that they can become productive members of their society. The program will run during all three terms throughout the school year from the locations of the participating schools and will be open Monday through to Friday, 6:30AM - 6:00PM. At the different locations, children ranging from ages 6 – 12, will participate in different social and academic activities that will certainly engage them, build their character, positively transform their behavior, improve their academic performance and ultimately keep them in school, off the streets and away from illegal substances and street violence. The program will cater to the social, emotional and psychological well-being of the participating children by helping them to build healthy relationships with their peers and engage with people beyond their social group.

Also, this program will support parents that are struggling with what to do with their children early in the mornings and late afternoons when they have to be at their jobs. Because most parents cannot take their children to work with them, they have no option but to drop them off at their schools as early as 7:00AM and most schools typically resume at 8:00AM. Also, they usually pick them up late because they do not get off work until 5:00PM and schools close at 2:30PM. Leaving children unsupervised at school so early in the mornings and afternoons after school, from Monday through to Friday, puts them in a vulnerable position. Lion Hearts will partner with participating primary schools in the community to ensure that children are not left unsupervised and exposed to vices during the hours before and after school.

This program will be implemented by Lion Hearts employees known as community coaches and coach supervisors who will be solely recruited from the community. Prior to being offered a position in the program, every potential employee will be thoroughly vetted to ensure that they have the patience, perseverance, social/emotional intelligence and most importantly, the desire to humbly and compassionately serve children that are not their own. Once selected, they

will be trained specifically for these positions. In his book, titled *Neal Whitten's No-Nonsense Advice for Successful Projects*, Neal Whitten states that “only after project members truly understand their duties can they be expected to excel at them” (81). The program employees will receive training regarding community development, child development, conflict management/resolution, parenting skills and other relevant trainings as needed. The community coaches will resume at their assigned schools by 6:30AM to receive the children from their parents. They will serve breakfast to the children who might not have had the chance to have breakfast before leaving home. After breakfast, the community coaches will supervise the children in activities as needed. Considering how early the children have to wake up to get ready for school, they might need to catch up on sleep time. At 7:50AM, the community coaches will hand the children over to their school teachers who will be waiting to receive them. After the community coaches hand the children over to their school teachers, they will be available at the schools to support the daily class activities as requested by the school staff until twelve noon. After the children end their break at 12:00PM, the coaches will take their own break until 1:30PM. From 1:30PM to 2:20PM, coaches will be at the schools setting up the various activities that the children will engage in after school closes. When the schools close at 2:30PM, community coaches will be there to receive the children from their school teachers and take them to the space provided by the school. Between the time when the children close from school and when their parents pick them up, the community coaches will assist children with homework, supervise their leisure time (sports, clubs, arts and crafts) and supervise the scheduled weekly educational workshops for students. The order in which the activities are carried out would depend on the atmosphere. By the time parents arrive at the school to pick up their children, they would have had lunch and their homework would be completed. The community supervisors will

give them progress reports about their children and update them on any particular issue that they might need to pay special attention to. This support will ease some of the stress off of parents and children who have to commute to work/school several hours every day.

Community coaches and supervisors will regularly meet with the principals of their assigned schools as well as the school's guidance counselors, to discuss any challenges that students might be having and how best they can be supported. Frequent interaction and transparency will help to build trust between the program personnel and the partner schools. Among other responsibilities, community coaches and supervisors will act as liaisons between parents and the school administration. With clearly defined roles and responsibilities, they will be able to perform their duties more effectively and anticipate problems regarding their jobs more easily.

The major issue that this program will address is the well-being of the child. Because children spend most of their time at school, one of the most effective ways to gain access to them is via their schools where they are usually more inclined to express themselves because they are surrounded by their peers. If a child is performing poorly in school and is asked to withdraw or forced to drop out of school, this could wreak havoc on that child's self-confidence and sense of belonging. They feel rejected and abandoned by the school system and their parents who in most cases are not usually present. Such a child is at risk of being exposed to street violence, drugs, and other vices. These children are desperate for a sense of belonging and want to feel loved so joining street gangs will seem appealing to them. My proposed project will address this issue from an anticipatory angle in order to hopefully avoid restorative efforts in the future. Instead of allowing the children from disadvantaged families to get to the point where they have to deal with these things, we can intervene so that it does not get to that point.

Another issue that will be addressed is the well-being of the parent. The operational hours of this program will allow parents to get to their jobs early in the morning and stay at their jobs up until their children need to be picked up. Parents are more at ease knowing that their children are being cared for in a safe and healthy environment. Parents who are trying to further their education will have the time to attend adult classes knowing that their children are being taken care of in a safe place. In addition, parents who might have some free time will be encouraged to volunteer in the program and help children with whatever they might need help with. The long-term plan is for this program to attract the entire family unit not just the children so that the community as a whole can be involved and connected while being built.

The table below illustrates the goal of the project, the resources that will be required and where they will come from, the activities that will be carried out and by whom, and the outputs and outcomes.

RESOURCES	PARTICIPANTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	GOALS
<p>Personnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lion Hearts staff (20 community coaches and 5 coach supervisors)</li> <li>- Workshop presenters</li> <li>- Volunteers</li> </ul> <p>Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 participating primary schools in the Jakande community (space for before- and after-school care)</li> </ul> <p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UNICEF Grant</li> <li>- UNDP Grant</li> </ul> <p>Donations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funds from individual donors</li> <li>- Time from volunteers</li> <li>- In-kind (food, books, writing material, sports equipment, board games)</li> </ul> <p>Community Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lagos State Ministry of Education</li> <li>- Participating schools in Jakande</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 participating primary schools</li> <li>- 100 participating students (20 from each school)</li> <li>- 100 or more parents (depending on family dynamics)</li> <li>- 10 school staff representing participating schools (1 academic and 1 administrative from each school)</li> <li>- 25 student ambassadors (5 from each school)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Children are served meals</li> <li>1.2 Children are received from parents at the school</li> <li>1.3 Children receive extra support in school</li> <li>1.4 Children are received from school teachers after school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Reduced number of children left unsupervised and exposed to vices</li> <li>1.2 Increased access to resources for children</li> <li>1.3 Increased support for academic and administrative staff of participating schools</li> <li>1.4 Reduced anxiety and stress levels of parents</li> <li>1.5 Improved knowledge of parents of their children's day to day lives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stronger parent-child relationship</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Children are assisted with schoolwork</li> <li>2.2 Children attend educational workshops (twice weekly)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Increased number of children maintaining school attendance</li> <li>2.2 Improved academic performance of children</li> <li>2.3 Decreased number of students who drop out of school</li> <li>2.4 Increased number of children who graduate primary school to go on to secondary school and higher education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Equip children from disadvantaged families to perform better academically</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Children engage in leisure activities (sports, clubs, arts and crafts)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Improve children's social learning</li> <li>3.2 Increased self-esteem and self-confidence of children</li> <li>3.3 Increased ability of children to initiate healthy interactions with classmates and others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Empower disadvantaged students with knowledge, skills and resources, to develop leadership capacities, and to pursue their hopes and dreams for a better future</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Staff of participating schools trained to help administration better recognize and interact with students from disadvantaged families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Increased number of academic and administrative staff equipped to walk alongside students from disadvantaged families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Equip schools to better walk alongside their students from disadvantaged families</li> </ul>

The most effective way to support children from disadvantaged families is by being present and ready. In his TED Talk titled, “Help for the Kids the Education System Ignores”, educator Victor Rios who comes from a disadvantaged family himself emphasizes the importance of intervening in the lives of children from disadvantaged families. He explains that they are like oysters. They are only going to open up when they are ready and if that intervention is not there when they are ready, they will clamp back up (Rios). This is similar to what the executive director of JR told me: “if you want to serve people and love people, first you have to be there where they are. You have to be present and you have to be relational and you have to be available” (Eng, personal interview). This is why I believe that the best way to spearhead this project is through a community-based organization. The unique relationship that exists between community-based organizations and communities puts community-based organizations in the best position to genuinely understand and address the needs of the communities that they serve.

## **CONCLUSION**

My research is valuable because it helps to prove the theory that children whose families experience some form of social welfare and support, could potentially be set on positive trajectories that are self-preserving. It is a fact that a child that has a good foundation is more likely to do well in the future than a child that has a bad foundation. A good foundation requires parents to invest not just their money but also their time in their children’s lives. Unfortunately, too often, especially in developing countries, children are born into families that are unable to provide them with the basic tools that they need in order to succeed in life. Without these tools or proper support from their societies, children from disadvantaged families face the risk of becoming disadvantaged adults. In Nigeria, there are numerous disadvantaged families without a glimmer of hope for their future generations. If a child is born into a disadvantaged family, it is



almost a given that that child will remain disadvantaged. It is unjust that the destiny of a child from a disadvantaged family is predetermined through no fault of theirs. Children should not have to suffer as a result of their parent's socio-economic status. A good or bad foundation can and does ultimately change the trajectory of a child's life. This is one of the reasons why typically, children from disadvantaged families grow up and assume the same socio-economic status as their parents. It is for this same reason that disadvantaged families require some form of support to create the possibility of a better future for themselves and their children. It is important to tackle the problem at the root so that it does not blow up to the point of being unmanageable or irreversible. In order for children to thrive and succeed at being the best versions of themselves so that they can be productive members of their societies when they grow up, a good foundation needs to be laid down for them by their parents or their guardians.

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## Contextualization

### Introduction

Our world is made up of continents that are composed of various countries and in turn, countries include societies and communities that have different characteristics. These characteristics which could be influenced by social, economic, religious or cultural views, define and make a society what it is. In their book titled, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, Hofstede et al. state that “regional, ethnic and religious cultures account for differences within countries” (45). These differences are the reason why contextualization is so crucial when doing community development work. There is no singular definition of contextualization because it means different things within different spheres. But in the community development world, contextualization means tailoring programs, processes and interventions in such a way that they fit into and are relevant to the society for which they are created. In other words, programs, processes and interventions must be culturally relevant to the community for which they are designed.

For instance, if a community development program created for a community in the south of Nigeria is used in a community in the north, the results will certainly be different, most likely be undesirable and in some cases, even harmful. The reason is because the cultural fabric of the south is designed by its characteristics and this is taken into consideration when planning the program. These characteristics differ from the characteristics that design the cultural fabric of the north. Hofstede et al. define culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (6). In order for community development efforts to be most effective and efficient, community developers must contextualize their programs, processes and interventions in such a way that these programs are relevant to and

can be absorbed into the cultures of the communities for which they are fashioned. In this paper, I will explain why contextualization is such an important factor when it comes to designing and implementing programs, processes, and interventions, I will describe how creativity and innovation fit into the contextualization process, and finally, I will explain how I plan to apply the values and practices of contextualization in my future vocational work.

### **Importance of Contextualization**

This section illustrates why contextualization is such an important factor when it comes to designing and implementing programs, processes, and interventions in community development. The first part demonstrates why community developers must work in partnership with the communities that they serve in order to create an intervention that benefits the community. The second part illustrates how detrimental a solution can be if, while designing these solutions, community developers do not collaborate with the communities that they are trying to serve.

Designing and implementing a program for a community can be likened to a tailor sewing a bespoke outfit for a specific client. The tailor should not only want the dress to fit the client perfectly, but should also want the client that the dress is being made for to wear it and love it. This is why the tailor meets with the client, asks them what type of outfit they would like and for what purpose, takes their measurement and based on their assessment and their expertise as a tailor, they advise the client on a style that might be suitable for them. But more importantly, the tailor asks the client how they would like their outfit to be designed and between several dress fittings, together they come up with the perfect outfit. The reason for this back and forth interaction between the tailor and the client is so that at the end of the experience, a useful and desirable outfit is produced. The tailor's expertise in the trade and the client's knowledge of their

body type are combined to create the best outfit. If they do not work together, they cannot create a desirable outfit. Therefore, it is safe to say that the outcome of the outfit is dependent on the partnership between the tailor and the client. In this same light, community developers are like tailors and their clients are the communities that they serve. Good community development is dependent on the successful partnership between the community developer and the community being served and a successful partnership can only be maintained if the community development effort is contextualized. No matter how many years of experience a community developer possesses, if they do not collaborate with the community that they serve or suggest culturally relevant programs, their labor will be futile, unwanted and in some cases, harmful. In order for their impact on the community to be positive, they must first consult with the community that they are trying to serve before attempting to design and implement programs, processes, interventions and solutions for that community.

According to Hofstede et al. “one of the reasons why so many solutions do not work or cannot be implemented is that differences in thinking among the partners have been ignored” (4). This statement conveys two implications regarding why solutions do not work – the first being that partners do not think alike and the second, that the difference in the thought processes of partners is overlooked. Too often, community developers from various fields make the common mistake of assuming that some life changing process or program that has previously been successfully received and implemented in a particular community will also be received and just as successful in another community. Also, they feel that their years of experience should be enough to reassure any community that they know what is best regarding their vocation and therefore their recommendation should be accepted without resistance or questions. They fail to take into account the dissimilar features of the different communities that they function within or

factor in cultural relevance of their approach. This is where contextualization would come into play.

A typical example of this sort of poor interaction can be seen in the true story that Anne Fadiman tells through her book titled, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. Fadiman narrates the story of the clash between a refugee Hmong family in the United States and the doctors that were responsible for providing healthcare for this family's sick child, Lia. Her summary of the Hmong people encapsulates their culture:

The history of the Hmong yields several lessons that anyone who deals with them might do well to remember. Among the most obvious of these are that the Hmong do not like to take orders; that they do not like to lose; that they would rather flee, fight or die than surrender; that they are not intimidated by being outnumbered; that they are rarely persuaded that the customs of other cultures, even those more powerful than their own, are superior; and that they are capable of getting very angry. (17)

Hofstede et al. remind us that “ethnic and religious groups often transcend political country borders” (45). This is certainly true for the Hmong people. When the Lee's fled their village in Laos, Vietnam, and arrived in the United States, they migrated with their cultural beliefs and practices that the Hmong people have lived by since the time of their ancestors. A Hmong woman once told Fadiman that “every Hmong in town knew about the *dab* who lived at the intersection of Highway 99 and G Street. This *dab* liked to cause accidents by making Hmong drivers fall asleep or making the cars of approaching Americans invisible” (101). Irrespective of their geographical location, the Hmong believed that the spirits from their homeland were present with them in the United States, so they performed rituals to honor the protective ones and pacify the malicious ones like they did when they were in their homeland. The Lee's were

shamanistic animists so when their daughter had an epileptic seizure during her infancy, they believed that her illness was caused by the loss of her soul and could be treated most effectively by a shaman through animal sacrifice to reunite her body and soul (81). They also believed that her epilepsy was a spiritual gift, so they refused to regularly administer Lia's anti-seizure medication because they did not want the western medicine to interfere with the spirit that they believed was responsible for her epilepsy. Hofstede et al. state that "the source of one's mental programming lie within the social environments in which one grew up and collected one's life experiences" (5). When talking about soul loss with Fadiman, Lia's father says, "The doctors can fix some sicknesses that involve the body and blood, but for us Hmong, some people get sick because of their soul, so they need spiritual things. With Lia, it was good to do a little medicine and a little *neeb*, but not too much medicine because the medicine cuts the *neeb*'s effect" (100). This is why the Lee's focused more on traditional methods of healing known to the Hmong and this frustrated Lia's doctors. Fadiman writes that "to persuade Hmong people to undergo necessary surgery, and to improve the outcomes if they consent, enlist the support of family and community leaders" (266). When measured against other cultures on Hofstede's cultural indices, the Hmong culture is extremely collectivist and vastly high-power distance. This means that they consider their families in everything that they do as individualism is frowned upon. They usually tend to consult with their immediate as well as extended family members before taking major decisions and they have immense respect for their elders. But Lia's doctors did not know this. In as much as they had her best interest at heart, they failed to take the Hmong culture into consideration. Lia's father tells Fadiman that "sometimes the soul goes away but the doctors don't believe it. I would like you to tell the doctors to believe in our *neeb*" (100). To the Lee's it appeared like the doctors were trying to persuade them that the American treatment was superior



to and more powerful than the Hmong's treatment and this made the Lee's more determined to defy them. If the doctors had considered aspects of the Hmong culture like their tradition, their collectivist nature or their resistance to outside authority, and had been more accommodating to these factors, they could have been able to chart a treatment plan for Lia that the Lee's might have been more willing to adhere to. Also, they would have known that appealing to elders in the Lee's community would have been an easier way to persuade them to follow Lia's treatment plan.

After reading this book and doing some research, like Fadiman, I am inclined to believe that the grand mal seizure that eventually led to Lia's organ failure was brought about by a lack of partnership between her family and the medical staff trying to help her. If the doctors had contextualized their treatment method, Lia's parents would have been more receptive, and the tragedy that ensued might have been evaded. This is why contextualization is such an important factor when it comes to designing and implementing programs, processes, and interventions. According to the New York Times, as a result of this tragedy, a social service agency was founded to facilitate the medical care for non-English speaking residents in the community where the Lee's lived at the time. Also, at the Yale School of Medicine, the incoming classes are required to read Fadiman's book. They understand that hospital wards are becoming more diverse and that there is a lot to be learned from Lia's story (Fox).

### **Creativity and Innovation in Contextualization**

As community developers, we must be creative and innovative when trying to contextualize processes, programs and interventions for the communities that we are trying to serve. In their book titled *Creative Confidence*, Tom Kelley and David Kelley state that "creativity comes into play wherever you have the opportunity to generate new ideas, solutions

or approaches” (3). During the months of my fieldwork, I spent my time observing and interacting with the staff and beneficiaries of two community-based organizations. One is called Jubilee REACH and the other is called Seattle Union Gospel Mission. By applying creativity to their processes, programs and interventions, these two community-based organizations are able to provide relevant and appropriate services to the disadvantaged people groups in their respective communities. This section demonstrates how Jubilee REACH applies creativity and innovation in its contextualization process.

For instance, when I interviewed the Executive Director of Jubilee REACH, Randy Eng, one cryptic but important thing he said about Jubilee Reach was that they “meet people where they are, where they are” (Eng, personal interview). By this, he meant JR meets the people that they serve, physically and mentally: locating the people that need assistance and extending help to them no matter what condition they might be in and no matter how far detached they might seem. He also stated that “because 86% - 90% of the people in the city of Bellevue are touched through the Bellevue school district, putting people that can love and care and nurture our youth and extend it to their families into the schools is one of the things that we do” (Eng, personal interview). Jubilee REACH listened to its community and found out that parents in the area were struggling with where to put their children in the early mornings and in the late afternoons while they were at work. During an interview with Jubilee REACH’s Director of Business and Finance, Lindsey Hoffman, she stated that a former principal of one of the schools they work with expressed to Jubilee Reach that “a lot of kids come from families that are hardly able to make ends meet and they’re dropping them off at 6:00 AM in the morning and school doesn’t start until 8:30 AM. So, they just wait outside the school for two and a half hours and many times they don’t have breakfast” (Hoffman, personal interview). One of Jubilee REACH’s

creative processes is collaborating with the public schools in the area to provide before- and after-school care for children in the Bellevue community. A safe place where parents can drop off their children before school where they will be fed and then taken on to school and later picked up after school. Jubilee REACH is the only community-based organization in that area that provides a combination of these two services at no cost to the parents and this is one of the features that makes their organization different from other community-based organizations. Because of Jubilee REACH's collaboration with the public schools, they are able to establish personal relationships with the children and they also get to know the practical and deeper needs of their families. This allows them to provide relevant support.

Another way that Jubilee REACH applies creativity to its contextualization process is by asking the people group that they serve "what do you need help with?" as against forcing readymade programs on them. In this sense, Jubilee REACH is more people oriented than program oriented. The reason is not because they are against programs, but because their interventions are dynamic and not easily boxed into program mode. They understand that different disadvantaged groups require different forms of support. They also understand that in reality, not all disadvantaged groups will fit into the programs that community-based organizations create. For instance, JR works with about fourteen schools in the Bellevue district but despite the fact that all these schools are high-need schools with students from disadvantaged families, JR provides different forms of support for them. Some schools approach JR and say, "we understand that you are doing such and such with this other school and we would like you to do the same with our school." At the same time, some schools will say "we understand that you are doing such and such with this other school and we would like you to do something similar with our school. Some schools might even say, "this is the challenge we are facing in our school.

What can you do to support us?” (Hoffman, personal interview). It is evident that JR does not use a one-size-fits-all approach.

If Jubilee REACH does not apply creativity and innovation to its contextualization process, it will only be able to serve a small population of its community. By focusing more on how best they can be of service to the people in their community rather than on creating programs, Jubilee REACH is able to support a wider variety and a larger population of the people in their community. After all, community development is not about improving the lives of only a few people but about improving the standard of living for as many people as possible in the community.

### **Vocational Work**

For as long as I can remember, I have always wanted to establish an organization in my Nigerian community that would support disadvantaged children. The project I proposed for my thesis, is a before- and after-school program for disadvantaged children in my community that I intend to carry out in the future. This section illustrates how I applied the values and practices of contextualization in the project I proposed.

On Hofstede’s cultural indices, Nigeria scores 84 on the indulgent dimension. According to Hofstede, this means that people in Nigeria “generally exhibit a willingness to realize their impulses and desires with regard to enjoying life and having fun .... In addition, they place a higher degree of importance on leisure time, ... (Hofstede Insight). Being Nigerian, I can attest to this fact. It is for this reason that my proposed project does not include a curriculum. I know that because a curriculum requires that established plans must be strictly adhered to, it has a low chance of working in my proposed project. Rather than having planned activities that the children are to take on at a set time every day, the program allows flexibility so that the children

can engage in different events in different orders. For instance, sometimes, the children could start with playing games, then move on to schoolwork, and then lunch. Other times, they could start with lunch and then move on to schoolwork, and then on to playing games. The idea is to change up the routine so that the children do not get bored doing the same activities at the exact same time every day.

Another way that I applied the values and practices of contextualization in the project I proposed is by maintaining that the community coaches and coach supervisors for the program are women solely employed from within the community. Unemployed women add to the financial burdens of their already struggling communities. If job opportunities are not created for them, the community as a whole will continue to suffer. In their book titled *Theories of Development*, Richard Peet and Elaine R. Hartwick state that “women always played important roles in the economies of their societies as both productive and reproductive actors” (183). The strategy is to create employment opportunities for women in the community who due to lack of advanced formal education are not highly sought after in the employment market so that an important sector of the community will be empowered. On Hofstede’s cultural indices, Nigeria scores 30 on the individualism dimension. In other words, Nigeria has a collectivist society. According to Hofstede, this means that “the society fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their groups” (Hofstede Insight). Giving jobs to women in the community will greatly improve their standard of living. The community will be pleased with the fact that we will only employ from their group because it will indicate to them that we truly have their best interest in mind. Also, the fact that members of the community will serve as community coaches and coach supervisors will play a significant role in parents’ decision to register their children in the program. Because the staff of the program will be

women from the community, parents will have more trust in it and be more inclined to enroll their children.

A third way that I applied the values and practices of contextualization in the project I proposed is in operating the program within the premises of the participating schools. If the program were to be conducted in an independent location outside the premises of the schools, it would mean that after school, the participating children would have to be transported from their schools to a different location. To be able to do this, the program must either own or rent buildings and buses. Because the program that I am proposing will take place at the location of the different participating schools, there will be no need to own or rent buildings or buses. This will reduce the overall cost of the project and will make it possible to utilize more of the limited funds on items for the children like food, books, writing material, sports equipment, board games, etc. Also, parents will feel a lot more comfortable enrolling their children in a program that does not require their children to be transported from one place to another on a daily basis.

Prior to my ICD experience, with regards to contextualizing community development processes, I was only armed with the basic information and my good intentions. Now I am better equipped with the necessary information and knowledge that I will need. Based on what I learned during my field research and my experience as a Nigerian, I am able to apply the values and practices of contextualization in this project that I have proposed for my community in Lagos, Nigeria. I believe this project will work because it initiated and spearheaded by a community that wants to see parents and their children thriving.

## **Conclusion**

Because every community has diverse features that make it unique and different from other communities, there is no one-size-fits-all approach or solution when it comes to interacting

with diverse communities. Even communities that share similar beliefs or communities that are close together in terms of geographical location cannot and should not be interacted with in the same manner. With regards to community development specifically, what works in one society might not work in another even though said societies might share similar characteristics.

The importance of contextualization is evident the case of the refugee Hmong family in the United States and the American doctors that were responsible for providing healthcare for this family's sick child. Despite the fact that this family migrated to the United States, they still believed in and practiced their culture from their home country. The American doctors did take these factors into consideration while trying to treat the sick child and both groups clashed as a result. In this case, the doctors' interventions were not only unwanted but also detrimental because the clash led to the eventual fatality of the patient.

The importance of contextualization is also evident in the work that Jubilee REACH does in its community. During the time I spent with them, I observed that the families they serve are of different ethnicities and that each family requires different needs. Because Jubilee REACH tailors its solutions on a case by case basis, its participants benefit greatly from this and the organization is able to serve a lot more people. When designing and implementing the plans for community development, we must take various aspects into consideration. For instance, the society's culture(s), geographical location, climate, etc. In as much as community developers have various years of experience, if they do not tailor their intervention programs, their efforts will be pointless, unwelcome and in some cases, destructive. If they want their impact on the community to be positive, they must contextualize their intervention program and the best way to do this is to consult with the community that they are trying to serve before attempting to design and implement programs, processes, interventions and solutions for that community.

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## Qualitative Inquiry

### Introduction

When we are interested in an issue and we want to discover more about it, we tend to go into investigative mode. In order to be more informed about an issue, we have to focus on the subject and gather information by asking relevant questions. This act of information-gathering can be classified as a form of research. In his book titled *Action Research*, Ernest T. Stringer defines research as “systematic and rigorous inquiry or investigation that enables people to understand the nature of problematic events or phenomena” (5). The questions that we ask will most likely lead us to responses that will address our curiosity and possibly increase our understanding of the subject. Irrespective of how basic the enquiry might seem, knowingly and unknowingly, we engage in research in our day-to-day lives. In their book titled *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell state that “there are many definitions of research, but what they all have in common is the notion of inquiring into, or investigating something in a systematic manner” (3). In general, the type and purpose of the research will usually determine the manner in which the inquiries are carried out. There are several types of research but for the purpose of this paper, I will focus on qualitative research. This falls under the umbrella of applied research which according to Merriam and Tisdell means that it is “undertaken to improve the quality of practice of a particular discipline” (3). In other words, this type of research is geared towards instigating positive change and is not carried out merely for the purpose of increasing knowledge alone as is the case with basic research. One cannot instigate positive change without having an in-depth knowledge of the circumstances that they are trying to transform and the only way that one can gain this in-depth knowledge is by conducting research on that topic.

In this paper, I will explain what is distinctive about the qualitative approach and why it is particularly useful in the practice of community development. I will highlight some of the values that inform qualitative methods and illustrate how these values resonate with core ICD values. Finally, using my proposed project as a case example, I will use the research I did to demonstrate the usefulness of qualitative methods, I will identify the types of outcome markers I will be looking for in a future, hypothetical evaluation of my proposed project, I will demonstrate how I plan to utilize qualitative research methods to measure the impact of my proposed project and explain why community developers should include qualitative elements in their effectiveness evaluation.

### **Distinctive Features of Qualitative Approach**

The qualitative approach has distinctive features that distinguishes it from the quantitative approach and other approaches. Some of these features are that it is inductive, the researcher is the main instrument for collecting data and analyzing it and, it is very descriptive. In this section, I will explain these features and how they are particularly useful in the practice of community development.

To say that the qualitative approach is inductive means that the researcher makes broad generalizations from specific observations. Qualitative researchers “gather data to build concepts, hypothesis, or theories” (Merriam and Tisdell 17). Based on already existing data, qualitative researchers go into the field which is usually the community that they are trying to understand, and they make observations and based on the patterns that they notice, they make a generalization and draw conclusions from the data that they gather. For instance, I observed that children from disadvantaged families in my community struggled in different aspects of their lives. The pattern I noticed was that as they got older, a lot of these children remained

underprivileged or became even more disadvantaged and that the socio-economic status of their parents played a significant role in this. However, it appeared that with some form of intervention, they had a better chance to do well in life. In order to build this hypothesis, I went into the field to gather data. I chose two community-based organizations that support disadvantaged families as my field. The interviews that I conducted and the observations that I made while in the field, combined with the preexisting data, helped to build the concept that when community-based organizations intervened in the lives of disadvantaged families, they had a better chance to thrive. Qualitative researchers build towards theory by interacting with, studying and observing the participants in their natural environment. They do not manipulate or control what is being observed but rather they allow things to happen naturally in the field. Qualitative researchers understand and approach the members of the communities that they are trying to serve as real life people rather than mere theories or facts and figures that can be manipulated to churn out data.

A second distinctive feature of the qualitative approach is that the researcher is the main instrument for collecting data and analyzing it. Because there are various forms of data-gathering techniques and these different techniques yield different sorts of responses, the outcomes cannot be pre-defined. This is why Merriam and Tisdell state that “since understanding is the goal of this research, the human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data” (16). Qualitative inquiry uses stories as data and the ways that qualitative researchers obtain these stories are through conducting personal interviews, participant observation, self-reports, focus groups, questionnaires containing multiple-choice, true or false or open-ended questions, analyzing documents and artifacts, and so on. After the researcher has chosen his or her topic of interest,

they decide on the field location(s), select the interviewees, come up with questions to ask, document their observations while in the field, choose what documents and artifacts they want to examine, decide on the size of focus groups, and so on. During interviews and focus groups, it is the researcher's responsibility to make the interviewees and focus group participants feel comfortable enough to take part in discussions, to keep them on track, and to know when to probe them further and when to hold back. The researcher must sort through all that raw data so that it can be translated into usable data that will be imbedded into his or her work. This process is referred to as transcribing. In the process of transcribing mined data, the researcher is likely to come across some information that might need some clarification. In such a case, the researcher would most likely reach out to the participants to ask them to shed more light on the matter. The data collected can only be interpreted by an actual person because these anticipations, decisions, deciphering body language and so on, can only be dealt with by a human being. This is why with regards to qualitative approach, the researcher is the main instrument for collecting and analyzing data. Processing all that raw data requires the researcher to fact-check and this helps the researcher to learn more about the subject matter that they are studying.

Another distinctive feature of the qualitative approach is that it is richly descriptive. "Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon" (Merriam and Tisdell 17). Because the qualitative researcher's words and pictures function as the research data, it is important that they are able to successfully portray the information that they gather while in the field. For instance, in his book titled *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*, Seth Holmes narrates the real-life experiences of the Mexican migrant farmworkers that despite the perilous circumstances, risk everything to illegally cross the border into the United States because the conditions in their own

countries were too hopeless for them to remain there. Holmes spent five years in the field among the Triqui people from Oaxaca, Mexico. During this time, among other things, he joined a group of Mexicans to cross the border into the United States in search of jobs. Holmes describes what this experience was like:

The pickup drops us off in the middle of the desert .... The coyote tells us to duck down and wait. He walks ahead, then motions down low with one arm, and we all run as fast as we can to and through – mostly under – a seven-foot barbed-wire fence. We run across a sand road and through another barbed-wired fence and keep running until we cannot breathe anymore. Now we walk quickly. It is around 6:30 P.M., and the sun just finished setting. We do this at least 10 more times – through, under and over tall wood and barbed-wire fences .... We pull cactus spines out of our shins from cacti we did not see in the dark night .... We fall asleep, using torn-open plastic trash bags as blankets .... Suddenly, our coyote runs back speaking quickly in Triqui. Two Border Patrol agents – one black and one white – appear running through the trees, jump down into our creek bed, and point guns at us. (18-21)

Holmes' thick and rich descriptions strengthen his voice of authority and recreate the atmosphere so much so that the reader can clearly imagine what it must have felt like to be there. It also reveals his thought process making it possible for any researcher doing parallel work to make similar applications but with the necessary changes to suit his or her own context. The descriptive feature of qualitative research makes it easily adaptable to different situations.

These three features of the qualitative approach make it particularly useful in the practice of community development for the following reasons. Researchers are able to conduct their research more thoroughly because their personal interactions with the community provides

practical information that can be verified by the people group being studied. It involves the community in the research process and helps to build relationships. It creates an avenue for the community to have a voice in the proffered solution as against just prescribing or dictating to them what to do. The thick and rich descriptions of the content allow for an authentic representation of the community being studied. The qualitative approach is useful in the practice of community development because people problems are more complicated than just statistics. Researchers take these facts into account and immerse themselves in the research process in order for their work to make a meaningful change.

### **Qualitative Methods and ICD values.**

There are several values that inform qualitative methods such as collaboration, copowerment and contextualization. In this section, I will use the work of Dwight Conquergood to describe these values and illustrate how they resound core ICD Values. He was an ethnographer who is mostly known for his work with the Hmong people of Southeast Asia and the Hmong refugees in Thailand. While working with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Thailand, he used his knowledge of the Hmong culture and folk tales, to help design and direct a form of health theatre to teach the Hmong refugees about important hygiene in the refugee camp.

Conquergood knew that the first step to getting the Hmong interested in the program was to establish a good relationship with them. So, he lived in the camp with the refugees and got to know them better by partaking in their way of life. He exchanged health advice and practices with their traditional leaders and even sought treatment for himself from their herbalists. Relationships were built as he showed interest in their culture and they in turn became interested in him and the work he was trying to do in the camp. In a journal, Conquergood wrote that

“getting to know a culture is important not just as a technique for collecting appropriate materials and ideas to be worked into performances, but also as a way of earning the community’s trust and respect” (222). Because of how he interacted with them, he was able to understand things from the community’s perspective and identify their needs and how best to meet them. For instance, the Hmong in the refugee camp did not speak much English and the IRC staff did not speak the language of the Hmong, so communication between both groups was extremely challenging. He recognized that cultural performances were familiar to the Hmong, so he used cultural performances as a technique for developing the program aimed at improving the health situation in the camp. Throughout the development of the health theatre program, Conquergood collaborated with the Hmong by actively soliciting feedback from their elders and incorporating their advice into the program. The Hmong hold their elders in high esteem so his show of trust and respect for their elders’ opinions caused the Hmong to trust and respect him in return. He understood the importance of copowerment and contextualization. In as much as the IRC was trying to educate the Hmong, there was a lot that they themselves had to learn from the Hmong. Conquergood knew that in order for the Hmong to accept and benefit from the program, it had to be culturally relevant to them and in order for him to design such a program, he needed their help.

With the above illustration, it is clear to see how the values of qualitative methods resonate with core ICD values. Qualitative researchers establish relationships with the communities that we serve so that we can know their stories, understand things from their perspective so that we know their realities, gain their trust so that they are willing to collaborate with us and accept our help, identify their needs and work with them to create solutions so that we do not force-feed them our idea of what we think they need.

## Case Study

In this section, using my proposed project as a case example, I will use the research I did to prove the usefulness of qualitative methods, I will identify the types of outcome markers I will be looking for in a future, hypothetical evaluation of my proposed project, I will demonstrate how I plan to utilize qualitative research methods to measure the impact of my proposed project and explain why community developers should include qualitative elements in their effectiveness evaluation.

### *Usefulness of Qualitative Methods*

Depending on the purpose for which qualitative research is being carried out, the researcher could use different methods. A couple of qualitative methods demonstrated in my research are ethnography and narrative inquiry. In his book titled *Ethnography at Work*, Brian Moeran states that “fieldwork cannot be conducted by long-distance communications, but requires that the researcher be physically present – what Clifford Geertz has referred to as ‘being there’ – and undergo total (or near total) social immersion” (117). This is what makes a research ethnographic. In order for me to successfully conduct the research for my thesis project, I had to spend a lot of time in the field with the participants at the community-based organizations (Jubilee REACH and Seattle Union Gospel Mission) that I chose for my fieldwork. Because of my continuous and direct interaction with the participants, I was able to establish meaningful relationships. The relationships that I built with the staff gave me insights into the organizations and access to the parents and children enrolled in the program. The relationships that I built with the children was so good that when they found out that I needed their help in conducting my interviews, they all excitedly volunteered to be interviewed.



Another qualitative method that was demonstrated in my research is narrative inquiry. In her research paper titled “Narrative Approaches to Case Studies”, professor Kim Etherington states that “narrative inquiry is a means by which we systematically gather, analyze and represent people’s stories as told by them ...” (3).

I got a lot of information from the stories narrated to me during the interviews that I conducted. For instance, I asked a parent what he needed from his community-based organization and he said, “just a sense of community and togetherness and I think this is why Jubilee REACH does a great job here” (\*Yaki, personal interview). He expressed to me that the children love being at JR because it is more than just a hangout place. Many of them have been together for four or five years so it feels like a family because everybody there genuinely cares about the children. It is pieces of information such as this that helped me to build my theory about the impact of community-based organizations in the lives of disadvantaged families.

Merriam and Tisdell state that “immersion in the site as a participant observer is the primary method of data collection” (30). I did not just mine data alone, but I was able to gain access into their world and see things from their perspectives. This is why qualitative methods were useful in my research.

#### *Outcome markers for Evaluation*

In their book titled *Evaluation: An Integrated Framework for Understanding, Guiding, and Improving Policies and Programs*, Mark et al. state that “evaluation exists to improve the way that programs and policies function by providing information that can be used in democratic institutions to advance social betterment” (49). In their article titled “Outcomes for Success”, Jane Reisman and Judith Clegg, define outcomes as “the changes in participant’s lives, community conditions or organizational conditions you believe will occur as a result of your

program (30). This is why the most effective way to evaluate my proposed project would be through its outcomes. Outcomes indicate the impact the project has had on the lives of the community for which it was created. I highlight some of the outcome markers that I will be looking for in a future hypothetical evaluation of my proposed project.

The first outcome marker I will be looking for is a decrease in the number of children that are left unsupervised and exposed to vices. Because of the long commute that families make to and from work/school, parents are forced to drop their children unattended at the school as early as 7:00AM and school starts at 8:00AM. Also, when school closes at 2:30PM, parents cannot pick up their children until 5:00PM which is when they close from work. During these hours, children are unsupervised and vulnerable. The project I am proposing allows parents to leave their children in the care of their community coaches before as well as after school, shielding them from numerous dangers. In addition, parents will feel less anxious knowing that their children are being taken care of in a safe and loving environment. These actions will cause a decrease in the number of children that are left unsupervised and exposed to vices.

Another outcome marker I will be looking for is improved academic performance of children. Because of how late parents pick up their children from school and the long commute home, there is barely enough time between when they get home and bedtime, for parents to assist their children with homework. If a child confirms that their homework is done, parents might not have the energy to crosscheck it. As a result, if this is untrue or the child is struggling with schoolwork, parents might not be able to pick up on it. The program I am proposing will equip the community coaches to assist children with their schoolwork. Also, they will be able to respectfully relay to parents what areas their child be struggling with so that they can be more vigilant. These actions will cause an improvement in the academic performance of children.

The third outcome marker I will be looking for is an increase in the self-esteem and self-confidence of children. During the time I spent at Jubilee REACH, I observed how well the children communicated during their leisure time. A lot of children tend to come out of their shells when they were playing games or doing sports. The program I am proposing will include leisure activities like sports, clubs, arts and craft etc. These activities will teach the children about actions and consequences, leadership skills, how to work together in teams, how to amicably resolve conflict, time management, etc. These actions will cause an increase in the self-esteem and self-confidence of children.

“Evaluations help program administrators tell funders and key stakeholders, ‘this is what comes from our work’” (Reisman and Clegg 57). Nobody in their right mind wants to invest in an ineffective project. These outcome markers will show project stakeholders and funders that their investments are being properly utilized and the project is fulfilling the purpose for which it was established. As a result, the project is more likely to continue enjoying the support of the stakeholders and funders.

### *Measuring Project Impact*

As previously mentioned, a couple of qualitative methods demonstrated in my research are ethnography and narrative inquiry. These qualitative methods make it possible for me to measure the impact of my proposed project using data collection methods like observations, interviews and surveys. In order to measure the impact of my proposed project, I will be checking to see if the children participating in the program are less exposed to vices than they were before being enrolled in the program, if the children’s academic performance improves after joining the program, if participating parents are less stressed than they were prior to enrolling their children in the program, if there is an increase in children’s social learning, if

there is an increase in the number of children who graduate, if the partner schools are more equipped to walk alongside disadvantaged families, etc.

Using observations to measure the impact of my proposed project requires me to be discreetly present at the different locations where the program is being run. Observations are very useful to measure the impact of a project because it will give me the opportunity to collect unadulterated information. It is important to mention that, when observing, I will ensure that the participants being observed feel at ease and not as though they are in a fish bowl being watched. This way, the data will be more accurate because they are more likely to act natural.

Another data collection method that I plan to use to measure the impact of my proposed project is interviews. They are comprised of unstructured or semi-structured questions and are usually conducted in-person or over the telephone. Interviews will allow me to have direct interactions with the families participating in the program. Because of this personal interaction, I will be able to establish a good rapport for open conversation. In this regard, interviews are especially useful for exploring sensitive issues. In addition to this, when interviewing participants, I will have the opportunity to clarify questions and probe them for more detailed responses.

The third data collection method that I plan to use to measure the impact of my proposed project is surveys. They are typically in form of questionnaires that contain single, direct questions, series of questions about the same topic, and unstructured open-ended questions, and can be conducted in-person, over the telephone or via mail. In this case, because there are different categories of participants, my questionnaires will contain different sets of questions for the different groups. Because there is no opportunity for clarification as with interviews, I will try to ensure that the questions are as comprehensible as possible.

*Importance of Qualitative Elements Effectiveness*

**Conclusion**

Unlike the approach of the natural sciences, qualitative research takes place in the real world setting and not in a laboratory. In the world of community development, practitioners in the social science fields deal with the everyday concerns of people's lives because they are concerned about effecting positive social change. In order for practitioners in the social science field to successfully understand the needs of the communities that they are trying to serve and collaboratively initiate positive change, they must use qualitative research methods. (Insert more and polish).

I know this because I know that conducting an abstract research would not have given me sufficient information to answer all the questions that I had. I would not have established the relationships that I did nor would I have been able to gain the trust of the individuals that I interacted with. As a result, I was able to accomplish a lot more by conducting qualitative research in the field than I would have had I spent the entire time gathering information from documents, artifacts or the internet alone.

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## ICD Values

### Introduction

Before I started the ICD program, I obviously had preconceived notions about issues regarding community development, culture, globalization, social change, social justice, disaster relief, environmental justice and so on. But as I have engaged the different courses of the ICD program, I have been exposed to a lot of new perspectives through different material. I cannot say that my values have drastically changed but they have certainly been greatly impacted by my involvement with the ICD program. In this paper, I will describe my process of personal transformation. I will explain what social justice has come to mean to me and how I hope to serve as an influence of social justice in the future. I will describe how I understand copowerment and how I intend to express that dynamic in my future work. I will explain how my philosophy of service will influence my future vocational choices.

### My Process of Personal Transformation.

In Parker J. Palmer's book titled *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, there is a paragraph that I find particularly meaningful because it describes my personal transformation. Palmer writes:

We arrive in this world with birthright gifts – then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others disabuse us of them. As young people, we are surrounded by expectations that may have little to do with who we really are, expectations held by people who are not trying to discern our selfhood but to fit us into slots. In families, schools, workplaces, and religious communities, we are trained away from true self towards images of acceptability; under social pressures like racism and

sexism our original shape is deformed beyond recognition; and we ourselves, driven by fear, too often betray true self to gain the approval of others. (12)

Palmer's words describe a portion of my life's story and how I got to be where I am today. From a very young age, I knew that I wanted to work with disadvantaged children. I wanted to be an advocate for children and disadvantaged people groups in general. Whenever I saw people suffering or being unjustly treated, I would wonder what I could do to improve their circumstances. I believed that if I cared about the right social issues and possessed just the right temperament, I could successfully navigate the world of humanitarian endeavors while making a positive impact. All I had to do was take some classes, pass them, graduate and get awarded a piece of paper stating that I had mastered what it took to effect positive social change in whatever part of the world that I found myself in. As simple as this sounds, it was not encouraged because in my society at the time, it was not a career one typically aspired to. I will give some context.

I am from a Nigerian family and in the days of my youth, most parents wanted their children to be doctors, lawyers, engineers or even bankers. Professions such as these were the only ones that were respected and therefore, worth pursuing. Other professions were considered not up to par because they didn't command respect or earn decent salaries. Thankfully, in recent years there has been a slight shift in mindset and people are willing to have a conversation about it. But back then, your career was largely determined by what you studied at university. If your parents could afford to pay for your university education, you attended university. It was not optional or negotiable. There was no such thing as a gap year to figure out who we were or what we wanted to be. Most importantly, you studied what your parents decided you were going to study. I hope this small cultural background information paints a clear picture of the situation.



So, I was pressurized by society's expectations and this is how I got employed at my first job after university. For several years, I enjoyed my career in the corporate world while keeping my real interests on the backburner. In my spare time, I would visit orphanages, volunteer and make donations but the more time I spent in the corporate world, the more frustrated I became. I knew that every day I spent in the corporate world was a day that I did not spend in the humanitarian world where I could be positively impacting lives. In his book titled *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, Frederick Buechner defines vocation as "the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need" (119). He emphasizes how being our authentic selves benefits not just us but also the people we share this world with. This underlines how important it is for us to perform the tasks that we are created to perform with the individual talents that we all endowed with. In her book titled *The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future*, Petra Kuenkel states that "if fear is keeping us timid or if we have internalized the parental critic, we aren't able to help the world" (89). This stresses the point that to ignore our gifts would be to deprive the world.

It took me a while to take the step to leave the corporate world and follow the community development path because I was driven by the fear of disappointing my society. In addition to that, the remuneration in the corporate world was attractive. Now that I am in this domain, I am glad that I made the choice because since I started this journey, my pool of knowledge has increased so much more than I had anticipated. I have newly found interests as a result of conversations I have had with people like me who are also passionate about effecting positive change in communities around the world in different ways. I have always been passionate about helping disadvantaged or marginalized people groups irrespective of their race, age or gender but

I have learned about many other ways my actions can effect positive change in the world. I have become much more informed and open-minded than I was when I started this program.

### **Social Justice**

In the past, when I heard the term social justice, some of the thoughts that usually came to my mind were issues regarding groups in powerful positions mistreating or taking advantage of groups in disadvantageous positions. In my mind, the perpetrators were usually big corporations that did not care that their actions were causing long term damages to people groups. I thought about corporations like Nestle and Nike that disregard international laws and exploit children in African, Asian and Latin American countries. So, for me, social justice meant standing up to these corporations in order to put an end to the injustice. But I never considered how I too could be guilty of social injustice. I explain below.

In his book titled *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Richard Foster states that “because we lack a divine Center our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things” (80). He also adds that “until we see how unbalanced our culture has become at this point, we will not be able to deal with the mammon spirit within ourselves nor will we desire Christian simplicity” (80-81). I have always considered myself to be a frugal person who makes a deliberate effort to not acquire or consume more than is necessary. I try not to make unnecessary purchases, I try to save money by paying the lowest possible prices for the things I do purchase and try to get the best use out of them to reduce waste. So, I was excited to learn more about issues like ethical consumption, sensible consumerism and fair trade. In her book titled *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of our Daily Justice*, Julie Clawson explains how “fair trade seeks to work within our current economic systems in ways that respect the dignity of the people involved and ensure that they receive fair compensation for their labor”

(42). This made me question my so-called ethical consumption habits and sensible consumerism. I discovered that the reason why certain products are cheap is because the working conditions of the laborers who manufacture them are terrible. They mostly work under extremely harsh conditions and are not fairly compensated for their work. These laborers are paid next to nothing and can barely afford to provide for themselves and their families. In her book titled *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as an Ecological-Economic Vocation*, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda states that “where people suffer under systemic injustice, seeking their well-being entails seeking to undo that injustice” (57). I now realize that by patronizing these shops, I was just as guilty of this injustice as the factory owners because I unknowingly and indirectly supported the structural evil that keeps the factory workers in poverty. By purchasing such products, I was saving my money, but the laborers were paying the price. I was an accomplice of the factory owners and the corporate industries that flood the markets with these products.

Being a citizen of a developing country myself, it never really occurred to me how my purchasing habits could negatively affect the working conditions of laborers in other developing countries located thousands of miles away. Now that I have learned so much about the source of cheap items, I have become even more cautious about what I purchase. Now I am not just thinking about myself, but I am also thinking about the individuals that produce the item I purchase. I have learned to ask questions about where products are manufactured, by whom they are manufactured and under what working conditions. These are some of the important questions that we all need to ask ourselves. I believe that if there is no demand for unfairly traded products, the working conditions for these laborers might be greatly improved. This is why my consumption habits are constantly undergoing transformation. This is what social justice has come to mean to me.

## Copowerment

Too often, aid workers, community developers and others who have roles in the humanitarian field use the word *empowerment* when referring to the work that they do or the relationship that they have with disadvantaged or marginalized groups. As someone who comes from a previously colonized and still developing nation, this has probably made me more sensitive about the word. I have always found the term patronizing and disrespectful because it seems to stem from a place of dominance. It projects the notion that marginalized or disadvantaged people groups are too weak, helpless or simply not smart enough to change their own situations and that they need the aid workers to give them the permission or the power to dare to be better. No people group has the right to give another people group permission to live the best versions of their lives. That being said, I agree with Paul Collier's comment from his book titled *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, that in terms of development "aid does tend to speed up the growth process" (100). And this might be one of the reasons why those in advantageous positions have this god-complex. They believe that people in disadvantaged positions are sitting idly, waiting for handouts.

I heard the word *copowerment* for the first time in my Culture Studies in a Global Context class and I immediately embraced the term because it brought to mind an image that was refreshingly different from the ones that have been painted in the past with regards to the relationships that exist between disadvantaged and advantaged people groups. I believe that assisting disadvantaged people groups should entail respectfully collaborating with said groups to identify and efficiently utilize their natural talents and resources for their benefit. This is how I define copowerment. Granted, sometimes there are cases where a disadvantaged group might not have access to its natural resources due to displacement, natural disasters or other misfortunes.

But even in such circumstances, the term “empowerment” should be used thoughtfully. No matter how in need of support a group might be, they would not appreciate being viewed or treated as incompetent by the people who are supposedly trying to assist them. In my future work as a community developer, I will be considerate about the impression that I create with regards to the people groups that I work with. I will approach them in a manner that says, “I am offering to walk alongside you and you if you need my assistance, I will support you in whatever way that I can.” When a community is approached this way, they are more likely to collaborate with community development endeavors. A real community developer wants the collaboration of the community because a real community developer knows that without the collaboration of the community, all community development attempts might be unwelcome, in vain or even harmful to the community.

### **Future Vocation**

In one of the chapters of his book titled *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Myers L. Bryant talks about how development workers are likely to have preconceived notions about the poor that affect how they view them and how they understand poverty. Bryant states that this is because “we “know” the poor only at a distance” (107). Because getting to know someone requires us to learn about their habits, struggles, triumphs, and so on, in reality, it not possible to genuinely know them from a distance. In order to know their true stories, we must be physically present with them for a period of time. Myers goes further to state that “we are tempted to believe that we are the delivers of the poor, that we make their lives complete” (115).

## **Conclusion**

I must acknowledge that my perceptions about community development have been and are still being largely influenced by the fact that I am a global citizen from a developing country. I have the privilege of understanding community development from different ends of the spectrum because I have experienced community development in the global south as well as in the global north.

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