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Causes of Poverty Today

Katie Harrison¹

Introduction

Definitions of poverty are hotly debated and widely documented. Having worked with some of the world's poorest people for almost fifty years, we at Tearfund are clear that poverty is both absolute (not having enough to live well) and relative (having less than those around you). Among the millions of people served by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like ours are many very different experiences of poverty. Their circumstances and locations vary. Some will leave poverty behind; many will not. But what they all have in common is a sense of lack. People cannot have or do things necessary for their survival, like eating. Or they cannot exercise any kind of power – through purchasing, voting or influencing – because they just do not have any.

Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.²

We have learnt a lot from the people we serve, and we have developed an understanding of human flourishing based on the scriptural concepts of being made in the image of God (Gen. 1.26-27) and living a full life (Jn 10.10). Put simply, a full life is one where people are able to exercise creativity and productivity, and to live in community with those around them.³ This, we believe, is the opposite of poverty, for when people leave poverty behind, their journey is not only towards something material; it is towards a life which is also richer socially, intellectually and spiritually. Once we have enough

¹ At the time of writing this essay, Katie Harrison was on the staff of Tearfund.

² D. Narayan et al., 'Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?' (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000). For more information, see <http://go.worldbank.org/H1N8746X10> (accessed December 2017).

³ Cafod, Tearfund and Theos, 'Wholly Living: A New Perspective on International Development' (London: Theos, 2010), <http://whollyliving.tearfund.org> (accessed December 2017).

money that our financial situation ceases to cause us to panic, our fulfilment comes from other things. Money is not the answer to all our human problems, but a complete lack of it is devastating.

Without an environment which encourages people to flourish in this way, it is easy for people to give up. Many of my colleagues would say that the biggest barrier to development is fatalism. If people believe not only that poverty is not only how life will always be and that they cannot change it (apathy) but also that it is somehow their preordained destiny (fatalism), they can become trapped in passivity and lose their belief in their own agency.

The answer, in our opinion, lies in restoring healthy relationships at every level. People are held back from fulfilling their own potential and from participating fully in society when relationships break down – both at a personal and a structural level. When people do not have a healthy understanding of their own identity and capacity, they are unable to explore and fulfil their potential. When families break down, children are vulnerable to trafficking and exploitative labour, and will often miss out on school. And when citizens and governments, or employees and businesses, do not trust each other, corruption and exploitation can flourish. Thus, individuals, families and communities become resigned to living with lack and, for generations, people miss out.

Often as a result of low expectations or of facing extremely challenging circumstances, people who are poor can become caught up in harmful habits which exacerbate their problems and further separate them from the people around them, holding them back from fulfilling their own potential. This cycle is as evident in poor communities in developed countries as it is in the world's poorest countries, as the UK's Centre for Social Justice found:

It became apparent that many of these acute social problems – worklessness, family breakdown, educational failure, addiction, serious personal debt – were very closely connected. Wherever we found one problem, we tended to find another. Where we found two we tended to find three, and so on. They were interconnected: we know that a child who experiences family breakdown is less likely to thrive at school. A school leaver who has struggled is more likely to be unemployed often or for long periods, and more likely to get into debt thanks to low or unstable income. Where unemployment and debt took root we saw how people are more susceptible to drifting into drug and alcohol abuse. This was a tragic pattern we encountered continually in people's lives and the charities helping them. Furthermore, the pathways to poverty facilitate an intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. Too often deprivation is destiny for those born into the poorest parts of the UK.⁴

So this vicious circle continues: relationships break down, people become poor, frustrations mount, people sometimes engage in harmful habits and alienate those

⁴ C. Guy and A. Burghart, *Breakthrough Britain 2015: An Overview* (London: Centre for Social Justice, 2015), 2; available at https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CSJJ2470_BB_2015_WEB.pdf (accessed December 2017).

around them, relationships suffer even more, people become isolated or habits become entrenched and passed on to their children. And so whole communities remain poor for generations.

What makes people poor?

Here are three of the hundreds of people whom I have met while working for Tearfund: the grandfather in Uganda who lives hundreds of miles from the city's markets where he could get a good price for the produce from his smallholding; the young mother in a makeshift camp in Lebanon who gave birth on the traumatic journey from Syria while fleeing bombs and shellings; and the parent whose house, business and young son were washed away by flooding in Malawi.

All three, and millions more like them, are poor. They have no access to basic services. Two of them have no electricity in their home, all struggle to get clean water. A functioning latrine – even a long drop – is a luxury. The two who live in Africa have never known any kind of prosperity. In fact, the Ugandan grandfather is now the richest he has ever been, despite living in a basic home in the middle of nowhere. The Syrian woman used to live in a comfortable home, which she and her husband built, decorated and furnished together. Now she is in a muddy tent in the Bekaa Valley, where it sometimes snows so heavily in winter that the snowdrifts cover her inadequate home. All three are living in poverty because of structural causes. The economic, governance and environmental systems in which they live have failed, and they are poor as a result.

Conflict, climate change and poor governance are among the causes of poverty for these three people. The horrors of life in Syria, where we hear that women are being raped in the streets and children suffer extreme psychological trauma from having witnessed barbaric cruelty, forced our friend and her family to flee to neighbouring Lebanon, leaving behind the comforts of their middle-class life.

Rapidly changing unpredictable weather conditions, with no early warning systems or flood defences, wiped out all that the Malawi family held dear, including their only son. Further, a lack of infrastructure – long and badly maintained roads with very little public transport, barriers to markets, absence of affordable patient capital, anti-competitive practices, no electricity – means that the Uganda grandfather's business relies on travelling traders to act as middlemen to take his goods to market instead of his being able to build up the business and move up the value chain.

These are known as *structural causes* because they are based on a failure of human structures to protect people's safety and enable them to prosper. The systems of government and private sector business have failed to deliver protection and basic services, or to provide the infrastructure within which people can thrive.

The roles of government and business are crucial. Tearfund's *Restorative Economy* report celebrates the successes of the markets in creating more opportunities for people to leave poverty in the last generation than at any other time in human history, while at the same time calling for greater resource efficiency in order to generate sustainable development for generations to come:

Markets have been crucial in enabling people to lift themselves out of poverty. In developing countries, 90 per cent of jobs are created by the private sector. And the countries that have done best over the past two decades are ones that established the right enabling environment to foster private sector growth: contracts that are enforced, customs systems that work, educated workforces and dependable infrastructure, from roads to broadband.⁵

So, a capitalist framework which relies on self-determination for the capable and safety nets for those in need must at the same time recognize that there will always be functions for which government is responsible. Whether they choose to provide services directly or through public-private partnerships, there are some responsibilities which a government must hold. In *Philanthrocapitalism*, Matthew Bishop and Michael Green argue that a scene in US political drama *The West Wing* misunderstands this:

In the penultimate episode of *The West Wing*, a favourite TV show of policy wonks, a multibillionaire Gates-like character tried to head-hunt White House chief of staff C. J. Cregg to run his foundation. She initially declines, but urges him to build roads in Africa. There is plenty of evidence that roads and railways are good for an economy and good for poor people, but C. J.'s advice was wrong. Infrastructure is hugely expensive to build and costs a lot to maintain, as the English philanthropists in the Renaissance found out. All the philanthropic capital in the world could not build enough roads to make a real difference in Africa – and within five years they would be falling apart with no one to maintain them. Public and for-profit private capital should build roads.⁶

A heartbreaking paradox of poverty is the natural resource trap, as posited by Paul Collier.⁷ He argues that some countries which are the most rich in natural resources remain worse off than those with less because their bounty attracts conflict for those resources, exacerbated by lack of transparency by officials who are happy to receive secret payments or use surpluses of natural resources for their own benefit. Equally, some governments in countries with high levels of natural resources don't believe they need to operate a tax system, and so their citizens are less likely to hold them to account. And other industries become less competitive because of over-reliance on the natural resource.

Despite their abundance of natural resources – in 2010, exports of oil and minerals from Africa were estimated at \$333 billion, nearly seven times the value of international aid (\$48 billion) to the continent⁸ – some countries remain poor because

⁵ A. Evans and R. Gower, *The Restorative Economy: Completing our Unfinished Millennium Jubilee* (Teddington: Tearfund, 2015); available at www.tearfund.org/economy (accessed December 2017).

⁶ Matthew Bishop and Michael Green, *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World and Why We Should Let Them* (London: A&C Black, 2008), 281.

⁷ Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done about It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸ Tearfund, *Unearth the Truth* (2012), https://learn.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/research/unearth_the_truth_-_november_2012.pdf (accessed January 2018).

human structures – including governments and businesses – fail to work together effectively to make sure that all citizens have access to decision-making and to basic services. Essentially, this is because of broken relationships at institutional levels which, when exacerbated by broken relationships between ethnic and tribal groups as in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), mean that natural resources like minerals bring no tangible benefits to millions of people. In a 2015 survey by Transparency International, 22 per cent of Africans reported having paid a bribe in the past year.⁹ The DRC is an example which demonstrates this complexity of broken relationships: its conquest and pillaging by European colonists and its painful struggles for independence from colonialism and subsequent divisions between communities within the borders set for it by its former colonists providing the background from which many of today's problems have emerged – problems exacerbated by ongoing external engagement that often takes advantage of internal tension and strife.¹⁰

In addition, the balance of protecting citizens and workers from harm while at the same time giving enough freedom for people to innovate and thrive is a responsibility held by both governments and businesses. For example, the commonly held consensus that the way out of poverty is through work holds true only when workers are paid fairly and are not exploited. Try telling a labourer in a sweatshop or rice field in Asia that if they work harder they will leave poverty behind. It is simply not true. Often, people are poor because systems failed. Governments or businesses let them down.

What keeps people poor?

Once in poverty, people remain there for various reasons.

Inequality

People who are poor are almost always excluded from opportunities and have limited access to essential services, from pre-birth onwards. Consistently, people without means receive lower standards of healthcare and education. Where people live without essential infrastructure and basic services, their children are more likely to die.

⁹ Transparency International, 'People and Corruption: Africa Survey 2015', https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/people_and_corruption_africa_survey_2015 (accessed January 2018). Reported in *The Economist*, 3 December 2015 (<https://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21679473-gloomy-news-transparency-international-scale-corruption-africa>, accessed January 2018).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991); A. Hochschild, *Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999); and Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of the Continent since Independence* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), which describe the colonial and postcolonial history of the DRC. For a more contemporary analysis of the DRC, including the ongoing conflicts' roots in the nation's history see, e.g., Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters* (Philadelphia: Public Affairs, 2012); Lise A. Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo, 1960–1965* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Emizet Francois Kisangani, *Civil Wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo 1960–2010* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2012), Thomas Turner, *Congo* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2013).

WaterAid report that, globally, 'diarrhoea caused by dirty water and poor toilets kills a child under five every two minutes' – that is over 700 children per day.¹¹

Diarrhoea is, of course, both preventable and treatable and is not a cause of death in countries where there is adequate and easily available healthcare. For this reason, it is a good example of the unnecessary injustice and the debilitating nature of poverty. For millions of people in many countries, if you are born poor, you stay poor – if you survive into adulthood at all, that is.

For children who make it to the age of five, the global lottery of access to education looms. To be fair, and Hans Rosling is particularly strident in rebuking NGOs for failing to celebrate sufficiently the world's progress in this area, primary school education is now far more widely accessible than ever before. Nine out of ten primary school age girls are enrolled in primary school.¹²

That is a huge achievement, and it is significant that the statistic applies to girls. Gender has always been, and continues to be, a barrier to economic progress in many countries, which is why there has been such an emphasis recently on offering women routes to market. For example, once a girl has completed primary school education, in many countries she will then drop out of the education system. She may be expected to work in the home or the family business. She may be married off in the hope of a better life for her or for financial gain for her parents. In some communities, she will be invited to go with a friendly uncle to the city for work; effectively, she is trafficked to labour in a factory or a brothel.

Even in a family which values education, a girl may find that once she reaches puberty she misses a week each month of her schooling, because schools in many rural areas of poor countries have no lavatories and she cannot bear the thought of people seeing her trying to replace her sanitary towel behind a tree. As she starts to fall behind with her schoolwork due to frequent absences, she becomes less motivated and gives up altogether. Because there is not a toilet. Because she is a girl. Thus, half of the community (the women) remain uneducated, their earning power is limited and everyone misses out. All because of a lack of basic sanitation.

The odds are stacked against people in extreme poverty because of broken relationships. A lack of understanding between men and women means that the school buildings have not been designed to work for everyone: there are no latrines. Broken relationships between civic authorities and citizens mean that there is inadequate infrastructure and children die because of lack of clean water supply.

In many countries where Tearfund works, children who grow up in unstable families, or where their needs for education and care are not met, are more likely to be trafficked, married against their will at an early age, or forced to work. These children miss out on their education and are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, because of broken relationships within their own families.

Sadly, this principle remains broadly true everywhere in the world. Many poor people do not live in poor countries; in fact, some countries are extremely mixed and

¹¹ See <https://www.wateraid.org/uk/facts-and-statistics> (accessed December 2017).

¹² Speech by Hans Rosling to Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London, 23 October 2015; available at <http://www.odi.org/events/4281-data-lecture-hans-rosling> (accessed December 2017).

so the poverty of their poorest communities is masked by their overall prosperity. For example, in 2010, one-third of the world's 1.2 billion extremely poor people lived in India alone.¹³ Broken relationships between those with power and those living in poverty mean that, while globally the middle class is growing at an unprecedented rate,¹⁴ not everyone benefits and there remains an unacceptable level of poverty even in countries where some people prosper.

Even in the world's most advanced democracies, poor children face more barriers than those from richer families and are less likely to achieve academically or economically. In the UK, the Sutton Trust found that disadvantaged young people are less likely to continue with post-16 academic study than those from more advantaged families.¹⁵ They also report that three-quarters of the UK's highest-ranking judges were educated at private schools rather than the state sector.¹⁶

Thomas Piketty, Joseph Stiglitz and others all document the effects of extreme economic disparity, and particularly the impact on economic, academic and professional progress of social capital.¹⁷ Children born into privilege have an advantage over those who are not because of their parents' connections or because they have better access to sports and hobbies and are therefore more likely to gain enviable university places or job opportunities. People in the 'sharp elbowed' middle classes are more likely to have access to education and health services. They know how to negotiate for specialist services when they need to and how to protest against services being withdrawn.¹⁸ A powerful middle class which knows how to use the system generates further disparity with those who do not.

Boris Johnson, a Conservative MP and former Mayor of London, and an unlikely bedfellow of Piketty and Stiglitz, complained in 2015 of a lack of social mobility in the UK:

Professional middle class jobs [are] dominated by families who have professional middle class jobs. Big top universities dominated by families who've been at top universities. You see it I'm afraid in the law, in journalism, in Parliament, in just about every profession. You see it in acting, for heaven's sake . . . you see it in

¹³ T. Too-Kong, *The Millennium Development Goals Report* (New York: United Nations, 2014); available at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2014%20MDG%20report/MDG%202014%20English%20web.pdf> (accessed December 2017).

¹⁴ Globally, the size of the middle class could increase from 1.8 billion people to 3.2 billion by 2020 and to 4.9 billion by 2030. Homi Kharas, *The Emerging Middle Class in Developing Countries*, OECD Development Centre Working Paper 285 (Paris: OECD, 2010), 27; available at <http://www.oecd.org/dev/44457738.pdf> (accessed December 2017).

¹⁵ Katalin Toth, Kathy Silva and Pam Sammons, *Background to Success* (London: Sutton Trust, 2015); available at <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/background-to-success/> (accessed December 2017).

¹⁶ Sutton Trust, Press Release, Nov 2015; available at <http://www.suttontrust.com/newsarchive/the-sutton-trust-and-prime-call-for-better-engagement-in-social-mobility-initiatives/> (accessed December 2017).

¹⁷ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality* (New York: Norton, 2013).

¹⁸ A. Hastings and P. Matthews, "Sharp Elbows": Do the Middle-Classes have Advantages in Public Service Provision and if so How? (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2011); available at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/57021/> (accessed December 2017).

sport, it's decades since we had in this country a culture of bright kids from poor background in huge numbers bursting down the doors, exuberantly bursting down the doors of the establishment.¹⁹

This widespread understanding across political ideologies of the dangers of inequality is important. In a world where political and economic systems have historically – intentionally or otherwise – conspired to keep poor people poor, perhaps an answer lies in generating some unlikely alliances between thought leaders and policymakers across political and cultural spectrums.

In the same speech about inequality in London, and confirming our point about the vicious circle of poverty, disadvantage and risk, Johnson said,

It is a fact that when bad things happen, they are more likely to happen to you if you are poor. You're more likely to be burgled if you are poor. You're more likely to be murdered if you are poor. Your kids are more likely to be killed in a road traffic accident if you are poor. Your kids' school is more likely to be in an area with heavily polluted air if you are poor. And you are more likely to die in a domestic fire if you are poor.

Unequal power structures, where the needs of poor people are ignored and little or no safety net provided in order for them to gain a level footing and participate in society, keep people poor.

Fatalism

In Tearfund's long experience of working as a distinctively Christian NGO and of working through local churches, we have found that there is more to tackling poverty than economic activity. The plains of Africa, Latin America and Asia are littered with the remains of good intentions. Wells installed and no longer used, schools constructed then abandoned, clinics built but now unstaffed and empty.

There are lots of reasons why many development interventions do not work. Fundamentally, we have found that the best way out of poverty, in a community where it has become a way of life for generations, is for the people in that community to lead themselves and each other on a journey towards prosperity.

When outsiders come in and do things to or for people, there may be some short-term gain, but often the benefit is short-lived. But when people work together in a community to save money and create a micro-economy, or to lobby local authorities and raise funds for healthcare or education, then their progress is far more likely to be tangible and sustainable. It seems obvious: when people do something for themselves, especially when there has been an element of sacrifice and hard work, they are more likely to commit to its success and to use the service well.

¹⁹ Speech by Boris Johnson, 'Inequality in London' at the Centre for Social Justice, 2015; video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDe-9GSCPYY> (accessed December 2017).

But it is not that simple. In many places, the first barrier to overcome is people's beliefs about their own agency. Time after time, we find that people have become accustomed to poverty and cannot imagine achieving anything else. It is a long and sometimes painful journey, even when sensitively facilitated by local workers, to bring a community towards a recognition that the power to change their standard of living could lie in their own hands.

Habits are ingrained, beliefs are long-held and traditions held dear. Our methods start first with the local church using biblical and theological reference points to help churchgoers understand the potential of their existing resources, before broadening the conversation using secular language to include people not in the church. It can take people a while to grasp that they have some decision-making power and to find the ability to dream, hope and do.

That is partly because of the daily drudge of poverty. People might work hard, doing thankless repetitive, physically arduous tasks in the home and garden, walking miles to fetch water, tending often unproductive smallholdings. It is tiring. And the consequences of poverty which we have already examined work against them – lack of healthcare, limited diet, low levels of education.

However, there is an increasingly wide recognition across the sector that some of the most crucial keys to unlocking people's potential are in the mind. The World Bank's Development Report for 2015 is entitled *Mind, Society, and Behavior*²⁰ and examines a wide range of development interventions where 'nudge' techniques to prompt people to do or not so something have been used.²¹ These incentivization or social marketing programmes have often succeeded in encouraging people to change behaviour patterns: to save money, take medications regularly, send their children to school. Persuasion techniques of many different kinds have often succeeded in changing some habits. In the UK, the government's Behavioural Insights Team developed a text message system for Job Centres to use to encourage unemployed people to attend recruitment interviews. Personalizing the messages and wishing the jobseeker good luck nearly trebled attendance rates.²² Attempting to change behaviours by persuasion can bring about some change. Personalizing and wishing the beneficiary well shows the value of relationship and adds additional value.

That said, apart from some research into the effects on academic attainment of the caste system in India, we at Tearfund would argue that the World Bank report does not go far enough to identify the root causes of attitudes which hold people back. There are reasons why some people have not developed productive habits, and tinkering with the effects is helpful but not as effective as addressing the causes. As we have seen,

²⁰ World Bank, *World Development Report 2015: Mind, Society, and Behavior* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015); available at <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Publications/WDR/WDR%202015/WDR-2015-Full-Report.pdf> (accessed December 2017).

²¹ Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), which argues that human decision-making is not wholly logical and rational but swayed by assumptions, ideas, fallacies and social influence and interaction. 'Nudge techniques' seek to nudge people, gently and almost unconsciously, to make 'better' decisions.

²² The Behavioural Insights Team, *Update Report 2013–2015*, http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT_Update-Report-Final-2013-2015.pdf (accessed January 2018).

partly people have not had the opportunity, education or access to helpful services which would help them to navigate the systems already available, however informal. This in itself contributes to a downwards spiral of lack of self-belief or of expectation that life could be different and requires of the rest of us a greater level of compassion – to respond to the challenge of poverty with humanity, as Matthew Taylor argues.²³ Alternatively, they have lived with repeated cycles of poverty, conflict and exploitation in their families, communities or countries which have meant that, historically, every time someone has tried to achieve something, they've been thwarted.

Most common, in our experience, is a combination of both of these which culminate, along with cultural or religious beliefs, in a perception of oneself and one's place in the world which is essentially passive: this is how things are, nothing has worked before, I do not have anything with which to try to change my future, and in fact I am not supposed to. This is my lot. My destiny is settled, and this is where I belong. These fundamental beliefs about personal identity and capacity are not easily changed. But unless people are able to rethink their assessment of themselves, their capacity to change and their ability to hope and bring about new things, they will remain trapped in poverty.

Is there a way out?

It is because of the need for such fundamental change that our distinctive approach at Tearfund brings in the actor we have not yet examined but which this book explores more fully: the local church. The church can be a version of civil society with a role to unite and mobilize people around a common cause, reaching towards a way of life that is better than we have known before and with a determined belief that the future can be better than the past, although it must be said that the church has often failed. In many places, the church has been part of the problem. Implicitly or sometimes explicitly, churches have condoned wife beating, child abuse and marital rape.²⁴ Churches have preached harmful approaches to money, either through poverty gospel – Jesus had no place to lay his head, so you are more holy if you have nothing – or a prosperity gospel through which only a few people benefit, and inequality becomes as marked in the church as it is in wider society.

However, the church's message is one of redemption, of restoring that which was dirty and shameful to a noble, honourable and beautiful state. Indeed, the church can and, in our experience, often does become what it was always meant to be: a group of people united in their desire to thrive and to bring others to find fulfilment in the

²³ Matthew Taylor, 'Blog: The Poor – Always with Us?' (RSA, 22 July 2015); available at <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/matthew-taylor-blog/2015/07/the-poor---always-with-us/> (accessed December 2017).

²⁴ This is clear from a number of Tearfund's reports into sexual and gender-based violence, including 'Breaking the Silence' (2013) (https://learn.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/hiv/breaking_the_silenceweb_final.pdf?la=en, accessed January 2018); 'Silent No More' (2011) (https://learn.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/hiv/silent_no_more_english.pdf?la=en, accessed January 2018); and 'Our Daughter's Voices' (2016) (https://learn.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/sgbv/our_daughters_voices_e_web.pdf?la=en, accessed January 2018).

creativity, productivity and community which together make up a full life. Thus, even though those interviewed about their experiences as survivors of sexual and gender-based violence acknowledge that the church has failed them, they are also often able to see the potential of the church to be welcoming, redemptive and transformational. For example, in Goma in the DRC, Tearfund's partner HEAL Africa has been working for a number of years alongside local churches to provide emotional, medical and practical assistance to survivors who describe the church as 'supportive and compassionate' and as 'contributing to our internal healing'.²⁵ When the church operates at this level, we see people's attitudes change and their levels of personal initiative and collective momentum increase.

This transformation does not necessarily mean changing one's religion, although sometimes that happens as people embrace their own decision-making capacity and choose a path they want to follow. It does, however, mean addressing some difficult questions about personal and family history, and finding the ability to dream some dreams and then put them into practice. Those are not easy for any of us, and for people who have always known the back-breaking daily grind of relentless poverty, they are particularly difficult.

Happily, we often see these social and emotional benefits in people outside the church as well as those who subscribe to Christian beliefs. A thriving local church can bring transformation to those in the wider community as well as to those within its doors – and it all comes back to relationships. This is clearly seen where churches and communities are trained to advocate for themselves at the local and national levels. Tearfund's 2016 report, *Bridging the Gap*, found that advocacy training within a church and a community mobilization approach gives individuals and communities confidence, leads people to seek out the information they need in order to advocate and promotes unity and change within the community (including those often excluded elsewhere) and improved relationships with decision makers.²⁶

For example, in Recife, Brazil, there is an informal settlement near a river. This community has no sanitation system or formalized waste collection, so human and solid waste is disposed of in the river. The river often floods after heavy rain, which is made worse by the waste it contains. The flood waters enter and destroy local homes and carry disease. The local church has mobilized the community to clean up the river and prepare for potential floods. They have also set up a scheme supporting women to turn discarded plastic bottles into a range of crafts and household items, from handbags to Christmas decorations. Finally, the church brought together fifteen local churches to develop the 'Clean River, Healthy City' campaign. They worked with students from the city's main university in Recife, created publicity materials for local schools and churches about the environment and the problems of waste and brought together the city council, public authorities, schools, churches and local associations for a public hearing on river conditions in June 2016. Their most recent achievement was to secure a public hearing with State Legislative Assembly of Pernambuco (the state in which

²⁵ Tearfund, 'Silent No More', 9.

²⁶ Tearfund, 'Bridging the Gap', 4 (<https://learn.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/topics/advocacy/2016-tearfund-bridging-the-gap-en.pdf>, accessed January 2018).

Recife is located) in April 2017 for the community to call for a clean-up of the river.²⁷ This has been possible because the local church has spent a number of years building relationships and earning the trust of the local communities.

Within a community of trust, where people are able to discuss amicably and take decisions together, the relationships at family and community level act as levers of power and enable people to represent themselves confidently to local and national authorities to access the services they need.²⁸ Often, they will meet the authorities halfway, such as building a clinic on the basis that the government will staff and equip it. Collective organization to develop plans and raise the quality of life together helps create a shared vision and move a community on from a sad history to a hopeful future.

Restored relationships create the environment necessary for people to flourish. A person's transformed relationship with their own self and a clear understanding of their worth and potential as an individual is both the cause and the effect of a hopeful and truly prosperous life. In tackling the causes of poverty, we must focus on the ways in which we want people to flourish: to have not just material prosperity but also dignity, agency and the opportunity to use their resources and talents. We must also look at our own contributions to systems that contribute to global poverty, for example, the ways we make lifestyle choices that create waste or demand cheap products, or the ways our Western governments assume that their citizens' comforts are more important than the well-being of those in poorer countries. The essays that follow in this collection look at some of the ideas and practices that can help us to pursue this goal.

²⁷ Tearfund, 'Why Advocate on Waste and a Circular Economy?' (2017), 8 (https://learn.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/circular_economy/2017-tearfund-why-advocate-on-waste-and-a-circular-economy-en.pdf?la=en, accessed January 2018).

²⁸ Tearfund, 'Bridging the Gap', 17–20.