

IN THE RIVER THEY SWIM



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...  
ESSAYS FROM AROUND THE WORLD ON  
ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY  
...

Edited by Michael Fairbanks, Marcela Escobari-Rose,  
Malik Fal, and Elizabeth Hooper

With a Foreword by Dr. Rick Warren  
Author of the global bestseller,  
*The Purpose Driven Life*



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This book is dedicated to Sir John Templeton.

He used enterprises to improve the lives of  
millions of people around the world.

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The poor can't sleep  
Because their stomachs are empty.

The rich have full stomachs,  
But they can't sleep  
Because the poor are awake.

—COPPER MINER,  
LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

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## FOREWORD

# Fighting Poverty with Purpose

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DR. RICK WARREN

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**P**OVERTY is a spiritual issue. It demeans dignity, shrinks the soul, wastes potential, and inflicts suffering on over half of our world's population.

Three billion people on our planet live in poverty. Over one billion live in extreme poverty, existing on less than one dollar a day. Does that matter to you? It matters to God. There are over two thousand verses in the Bible about the poor. That is how much God cares about the poor and how much he expects us to care, too.

The Bible says, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it's in your power to help them" (Proverbs 3:27 [NLV]). The authors in this book, *In the River They Swim*, are finding creative ways to empower the poor to break out of the generational cycle of poverty. They have worked, cumulatively, for hundreds of person-years against the backdrop of globalization where, as you shall read, "everything mixes with everything else." In a world marked by scarcities of raw materials, disruptions of technology, and mass migrations of peoples and where the rich have gotten richer and the poor, especially in Africa, have gotten poorer, these authors have chosen lives of hard travel, separation from their loved ones, and difficult, sometimes dangerous, conditions to empower others to escape poverty.

Poverty is also a leadership issue. We are told, "Without wise leadership, a nation falls" (Proverbs 11:14 [NLT]), and "Leadership gains authority and respect when the voiceless poor are treated fairly" (Proverbs 29:14 [Mes]). Actually, this book is as much about leadership as it is about poverty. You



will read about genuine leaders doing outstanding work in some of the poorest countries of the world.

Some of these authors lead nations. Ashraf Ghani, an esteemed academic and high-ranking world banker became one of the founding fathers of a new Afghanistan and an architect of the world's first constitution that integrated the needs of a democracy with the principles of Islam. He writes about using the centuries-old institution of money exchangers to do in months what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said would take years.

My close friend, His Excellency Paul Kagame, the president of the Republic of Rwanda, grew up in refugee camps in Uganda, rose through the ranks of the Ugandan army, mounted a campaign to end the genocide in Rwanda, built institutions such as rule of law and democracy, invested in education, and rebranded his country among the community of nations. He writes that entrepreneurship is the backbone of new Rwanda. He understands the biblical principle that “good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty” (Proverbs 21:5 [NLT]).

Recently, during a thirty-day tour of P.E.A.C.E. projects in Latin America, I met with government, business, and church leaders in Colombia. There I saw firsthand the dramatic turnaround in that country. Luis Alberto Moreno was a cabinet member in charge of economic development in Bogotá during the violent reign of drug lord Pablo Escobar. He was perhaps the first person in the developing world to see the need for growth led by export competitiveness. He became a legendary ambassador to Washington, leading the way to Plan Colombia, and now heads the biggest development bank in the region. His essay is about how to change institutions that, in turn, change economies.

Donald Kaberuka was minister of finance of Rwanda for seven years after the genocide and is recognized as an instrumental figure in rebuilding the nation. He is now the president of the African Development Bank where his insight and experience are being leveraged across the entire continent. He writes about his powerful personal experiences with private sector development and, perhaps more than anyone, is integrating this vision into the future of Africa.

There are other leaders in this book, perhaps less well known than

these men, but just as dedicated to empowering the poor in the world's most challenging environments. There is Sally Christie, a Canadian with a Wharton MBA, who has worked in Asia, the Caribbean, and all over Africa; and Diego Etcheto, a Venezuelan-American who served in the Marines in East Timor. Their laments on the frailties of oil-based economies will be widely appreciated. David Rabkin worked in the Palestinian Authority and became a well-known columnist in the Caribbean. David writes with an ironic style that amuses but always goes straight to the heart of the issue—the way he and others attach meaning to life.

The Bible points out that skill, not merely hard work, is a key to prosperity. We must work smarter, not merely harder. “If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success” (Ecclesiastes 10:10 [NIV]). These leaders have brought new skills, new ideas, and new expertise to some of the most remote places on the globe, and the results have been dramatic. But skill development is often a two-way street. As Rob Henning explored the ancient trading relationship between India and Afghanistan, he recognized that he, the imported expert, had much to learn from his clients before he could equip them with the skills he understood.

Michael Fairbanks and David Rabkin write about the development industry and its potential as a force for positive change. Their unusual candor about how they have been negatively influenced in their own lives by some of the industry's enervating norms of behavior should serve as a warning to all of us: stay true to your mission and to yourselves. Michael is one of the most brilliant friends I have, and I always learn much when we are together.

One of the delights of this book is the way that many of the authors featured the work of their clients to whom they have dedicated themselves and who have obviously become their friends. These leaders model the first sentence of *The Purpose Driven Life*: “It's not about you!” Eric Kacou, an Ivorian who returned to work in Africa immediately after receiving his Wharton MBA, writes so warmly about his respect for his clients—a coffee farmer and a fruit-juice exporter—that one is left with the feeling of wanting to meet them and know them equally well.

Michael Brennan's essay about Macedonia pays homage to a brilliant

tourism entrepreneur, a man who might succeed anywhere in the world in which he was placed. Michael Fairbanks' vignettes on presidents for whom he has worked surprise and delight us with the brilliance, foibles, and humanity of these world leaders. See how Mandela constructs a speech, how Castro learns, how Kagame envisions the future of his post-conflict nation.

Malik Fal tells us about Claver, a bright executive who each and every day faces the irrational challenges of economic growth with social equity, always learning and searching for perspective. The reader will end up pulling for the Clavers of the developing world, never looking upon them the same way again.

Jesus taught that the essence of leadership is service to others. He said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26 [NIV]). That statement kept coming to mind as I read these essays. The authors all model "servant-heartedness" by giving their time and effort, by providing their informed yet humble advice, and by training others. They help the poorest of the poor enter new markets, cut costs, change regulations, and find new distribution channels and new markets. They develop new models of business where the workers' wages increase and where the value of each human being is recognized by both managers and shareholders. This is not just good business practice; it is the way to positively impact people, our environment, and future generations.

Eric Kacou outlines this approach in his essay titled "Archimedes' Formidable Dare," and Marcela Escobari-Rose, a Bolivian who runs Harvard's Center for International Development, develops these ideas at the national level on her sojourns through Mexico.

Mother Teresa once said, "It is not what you do, but how much love you put into it that matters." It is all about love. Love is the secret of a great legacy. You will never be more convinced of the power of these words in relation to economic development than when you read about Kwang Kim's love of his work in the digital sectors of Brazil; or about the passion of Malik Fal as he reflects on racism in global commerce; or about the profound introspection of Andreas Widmer, who begins his story as one of the pope's elite Swiss Guard and then brings you to his present role as a high-tech entrepreneur.

Focusing on yourself will never bring you lasting happiness. Self-centeredness is a dead-end street. Jesus said, “If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life” (Mark 8:35 [NLT]). In this book, you will meet some people who are serving God by serving others. And they are doing it in the most effective way: by giving people a hand up rather than merely a handout.

The tired and discredited government approaches of simply handing out money to the poor do not work. Charity robs people of their dignity, creates dependency, and stifles initiative. We must not do for others what they can do for themselves. Instead, we must provide what we have been blessed with—knowledge, training and opportunities. We are blessed to be a blessing to others. The poor are not inferior; they just have not had the opportunities we have been given.

These new models of enterprise solutions to poverty are not really new. Anyone who has studied the Old Testament knows that, thousands of years ago, God gave us simple business-enterprise models that are transcultural solutions to poverty. Instead of thinking in terms of poverty reduction, the Bible focuses on wealth creation.

Today, it is heartening to see so many practitioners of development, political leaders, academics, and other professionals discovering the value of partnerships between all three sectors of society—public, profit, and faith—in creating enterprise solutions to poverty. Governments have a role that only they can play. Businesses have a role that only they can play. And churches, along with other houses of worship, have a role in economic development that neither government nor businesses can provide. Like a three-legged stool, economic development requires all three legs in order to work.

Of course, good work all starts in the heart. It must be personal before it can be professional. Anne Morriss shares her warm and amusing reflection on how she moved from building latrines in Ecuador to working inside the Internet bubble. You will enjoy Aref Adamali’s affectionate remembrances of growing up in a merchant family in Kenya, Elizabeth Hooper’s plea for seasoned professionals to work across traditional boundaries, and Marcela Escobari-Rose’s self-admonition not to forget

that all the things she learned in other nations could be applied in her homeland, Bolivia.

The factors of poverty are many, and the causes are complex. That is the reason we need a holistic strategy. The global P.E.A.C.E. Coalition is a network of networks that enables strategic partnering among businesses, governments, and churches to attack five global problems including poverty, pandemic diseases, illiteracy, corruption, and spiritual emptiness. Each one affects all the others.

“P.E.A.C.E.” is an acrostic for five global solutions: promoting reconciliation, equipping servant leaders, assisting the poor, caring for the sick, and educating the next generation. In the past four years, 7,766 members of my congregation have volunteered their services overseas in sixty-eight countries as a part of the global P.E.A.C.E. plan. You can be certain that we will be using *In the River They Swim* as a P.E.A.C.E. plan textbook and guide for assisting the poor and that I will be recommending it to the over four hundred thousand other churches in our worldwide network.

I admire you for picking up this book. It says much about you. Evidently, you care. My prayer is that these pages will provide you with new knowledge that motivates you to action. If I can serve you as you serve the poor, please e-mail me. “Happy are those who are concerned for the poor; the Lord will help them when they are in trouble” (Psalm 41:1 [TEV]).

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## Acknowledgments

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and constructive remarks in reading drafts. All their contributions were critical to our project.

Finally, to our sons and daughters, who inspire us to try to make the world better: we hope that Sebastian, Ely, Sarah, Jasmine, and Nico grow up in a world of greater tolerance, prosperity, and justice and that, one day, they will read this book with pride.

IN THE RIVER THEY SWIM



## Introduction

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A SUFI MASTER once told his disciples about the different levels of knowledge. “There are different ways to know a river,” he began. First, you can read books about it and learn its length, its source, its depth, its width, the power of its current, the types of fish it contains, and other tangible facts. Then you can undertake the long journey to see it. You invest time, money, and hardships to travel to that river so that you can one day sit on its shores and look at it. When that day comes, you have attained a greater level of knowledge because you know its smell, you feel the sand that borders it, and you watch the birds that play over it. Finally, at last, you take off your clothes, and dive in to swim in the river. You feel its current along your body, the gradients of temperature, its depth. You taste something of it. You wonder if you have the strength to swim its length.

### HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In the words of Thomas Sowell, the African-American sociologist, “We need to confront the most blatant fact that has persisted across centuries of social history—vast differences in productivity among peoples, and the economic and other consequences of such differences.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Thomas Sowell, *Conquests and Cultures: An International History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 329.

Unfortunately, the development divide between Western nations and the developing world, with the exception of parts of China and India, is widening. One consequence of this fact is that millions of desperate people around the world are ready to brave the dangers of illegally immigrating to richer countries to escape the threat of poverty at home. Another is that millions of disgruntled youths, with no prospects for employment and the decent life it could sustain, become easy prey for the fringe elements of poor societies.

We must also acknowledge that, during the past fifty years, our collective record in international assistance to the least developed countries has been disappointing. This has been well documented by Jeffrey Sachs and William Easterly. One reason for this has to do with the mindsets with which development practitioners engage the very people they are trying to assist. Economics-based abstractions originated in the metropolises of Europe and North America have done little to help.

This book is the antithesis to the search for solutions in the next big theory of global poverty. It collects the voices of leaders and field practitioners who have witnessed the complexity of creating prosperity in poor countries. From the fresh perspective of advisors on the frontlines of development to the insight of leaders like President Kagame of Rwanda, it tells the story of *change* in the microcosms of emerging businesses, industries, and governments.

As these authors reveal, eradicating poverty will not lend itself to a generic list of good policy measures that make regions and peoples better off. The answers, we learn, are more likely to be found in a heretical mix of economic and management theory; business strategy and practice; psychology, anthropology, history, leadership; and that most precious of human activities, integrative thinking.

A common theme that emerges in this collection of essays is that prevailing local mentalities and ways of life have been underintegrated in the development discussion. Development programs that do not draw from local knowledge to refine their global perspective fail to contribute to sustainable solutions. This book is, in great part, about what it means to cull the wisdom of localities to find answers to the world's greatest challenge. It is about establishing new rules of engagement with local leaders who have

the overwhelming task of creating wealth for the world's poorest peoples. It is about nontraditional solutions that are hard to measure, begin at "the bottom," and are slow to enact.

We ourselves are credible messengers for doing it the wrong way. Molly, a legendary union leader from an island country who had worked for twenty years as a hotel maid, was confronted by one of our economic advisors. He handed her a fifty-page document, which contained his rigorous analyses of the local tourism industry. He immediately made his case in his usual direct style: "According to my analysis," he said, "many hotels on the island have closed in recent years because their labor costs are too high—local hotel workers make too much money for the tourist markets you're currently targeting." Molly slowly flipped through the spreadsheet-filled pages, put the document down, looked straight at him, and declared, "To me, this is nothing but numbers on a page. It does not relate what we go through, nor does it show how these hotel owners exploit us!"

Molly was an essential player in the local tourism industry. The consultant was factually correct, but that was not enough to persuade Molly that she would be better off at the end of a radically new kind of economic journey. The detailed map my colleague had drawn was barely a starting place. He needed to demonstrate empathy, an understanding of the local context and Molly's own experience and, ultimately, a commitment to a fair solution. Change would require levels of mutual respect and understanding that the island had never experienced. Learning to foster that type of shared humanity was the consultant's own journey of a lifetime.

This collection of essays is written by people just like this advisor to Molly. They learned, the hard way, that in order to be effective as a development worker, one needs to understand not only how to apply economics and business strategy and the art of influencing donors, cabinet ministers, and presidents, but also how to listen to Molly.

They tell stories of developing country leaders who struggle to find solutions to the complex problems that assail them. They depict the frustration of well-wishing aid workers who use body and soul to fight hopeless causes. They describe the contradictions of the international aid community and the myriad of regrettable side effects that arise from today's dysfunctional donor-recipient relationships.