Indicators of Community Health

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Residents or foreign interventionists working to improve conditions in poor communities carry with them some idea of how the community *ought* to be. In the professional literature, this model is variously referred to as "sustainable livelihoods," "wellbeing," "sustainable development" or "community health." Theologically, the goals would correspond to various dimensions of shalom or the kingdom of God (see Howard Snyder's *Salvation Means Creation Healed*). Such a mental model is also necessary in order to assess whether those "doing development" have made a valued contribution to community health. Conversely, it also provides the basis for judging whether or not those interventions have unwittingly introduced harmful effects.

Under each of the goals listed below are subsumed a set of measurable "indicators." The need to formulate indicators of change has been acknowledged by many development actors: United Nations (UN) agencies, the World Bank, governments, community groups, mission agencies, businesses, educational institutions, and policy groups. While indicators do not change community reality, they do help shape the way actors perceive it. It is certainly true that we measure what we value, and we value what we measure. Specific indicators translate physical and social science knowledge into units of information into measurable units of community health. These provide a framework for focusing development activities, and for valuating the performance of local interventions. Indicators are, therefore, fundamentally important in envisioning and measuring the progress of community transformation.

The indicators draw upon numerous written sources: the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals and, in particular, its 2003 report, *The Challenge of Slums*; the philosophical reflections on human flourishing produced by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (*The Quality of Life*); the World Bank report on human development based on fieldwork in 23 countries (*Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*), and various online inventories of qualify-of-life indicators. While wholistic in scope, they are nevertheless provisional, needing to be tested and further refined.

1. ***Material security***
   - *Employment:* Number and quality of jobs created and sustained by residents though business development.

   - *Economic opportunity*: The ability to hold property (land and movable goods). The right to seek employment on an equal basis with others within the formal (mainstream) economy.

   - *Income and investment:* Increase in personal, household, and business incomes. Increase in personal savings and business investments. Improved material quality of life (economic freedom).

   - *Infrastructure:* Number of community facilities (e.g. roads, clinics, schools, water supply, etc.) built through resident contributions, linkages to external agencies, investment, and advocacy.

     Physical health: Overall improvements in diet and medical services. Increase in number of people living a life of normal length; not dying prematurely.

2. ***Psycho-cultural vitality***
   - *Imagination and thought:* The ability to imagine, think and reason; to form a conception of the good; to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life; to exercise liberty of conscience and freedom of religious exercise

   - *Self-confidence and efficacy:* Changes in the internal and external perceptions of the poor—who they are and what they can achieve together. Reduction in fatalism. Increase in levels of self-esteem, community pride, levels of risk- and initiative-taking.

   - *Life-enhancing education*: Increase in the percentage of school-age children (especially girls) enrolled in high-quality primary and secondary schools. Improvement in acquired skills (reading, writing, computing), and the dignity of learners.

   - *Cultural pride*: The protection and affirmation of religious or cultural traditions, occupations, and identities that provide meaning, direction, and joy in life. Ability to laugh, to play, and to enjoy recreational activities.

3. ***Socio-political equity:*** The liberation of the poor from various forms of humiliation, oppression, marginalization, deprivation, and powerlessness in order to become agents of change within their communities.

   - *Social respect and freedom:* Formal establishment of the social bases of self-respect and non-discrimination. Parity of respect among all community groups (especially women and minorities). Security against sexual assault and domestic violence.

   - *Gender equity:* Number of women accessing and controlling assets (title to land, businesses); number of women participating in grassroots and mainstream political organizations; reductions in the gender disparity in primary and secondary education enrollments

   - *Socio-political participation:* Increase in the number of residents participating in grassroots organizations, political organizations, local institutions, and various volunteer activities. Increase in number of successful advocacy/lobbying negotiations.

   - *Political freedom:* Guarantees of freedom of expression (political opinion), of assembly, and of religious exercise; enlarged choices to act together to improve the quality of community life.

4. ***Moral-spiritual integrity:*** Changes in vision, values, affections, habits, and ways of thinking that support changes in the economic, social, and political dimensions of community life.

   - *Individual Transformation:* increase of numbers of people in the community experiencing conversion form sin and spiritual revival

   - *Spiritual vision:* Increase in the number of community groups embracing a common, comprehensive conception of community wellbeing (*shalom*).

   - *Support groups:* Increase in the number of community members involved in support/recovery groups (including 12-step,).

- *Faith communities*: Increase in the number of people or faith communities gathered together as communities of worship, mutual support, religious practice, moral development, and public actions.

- *Personal freedom*: Increase in the numbers of people delivered from life addictions and destructive patterns: greed, idolatry, hatred, substance abuse, immorality, compulsive gambling, etc.

- *Just relationships*: Decline in the incidences of domestic violence, sexual abuse, divorce, teen pregnancy, and environmental harm. Increase in community-wide levels of gratitude towards God, mutual trust, cooperativeness, and environmental care.

5. ***Earth community***
   - *Land security:* Increase in the percentage of family units with security of tenure (as defined by residents).

   - *Capital Formation:* Increase in numbers of cooperatives and of accessibility to capital formation

   - *Rootedness:* Growth in the community's sense of history and culture (tradition) related to "place." Increase in the number of activities that safeguard ecological processes and biodiversity (natural capital) that may or may not have a market price (e.g. community gardens, waste disposal systems, clean-up of waters and lands)

   - *Stewardship:* Increase in connectedness to city systems providing create clean neighborhoods, open spaces, access to safe drinking water, improved sanitation, and community gardens.