

NEWS & OPINIONS

The CHIEF Approach: A New Strategy to Holistic Ministry

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Jesus said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20, ESV). The disciples were to begin in Jerusalem, move on to Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Following the example of Christ, the disciples walked from place to place and home to home talking to people individually or in groups. The people who received Jesus as their Savior and Lord were encouraged to build each other up. The disciples thus spread the Gospel through dialogue, a “deep, challenging and enriching conversation, a mutual process of building shared understanding, meaning, communication and creative action” (Westoby and Dowling 2013, 10). Dialogue, Westoby and Dowling (2010 and 2013) inform us, is the challenging engagement of the “other”. It demands sharing convictions while listening deeply to what the other has to say, engaging in a soulful orientation that involves the cultivation of welcoming relationships, and a commitment to solidarity among those involved in each other’s lives. This enables people to be transformed and then to engage in transforming the world. Dialogue is thus transformative.

Pamoza International, a nonprofit organization operating in northern Malawi in south east Africa, contiguously engages in transformative dialogue in its Christian outreach and community development work (Mtika and Kistler 2017). Following its contiguous approach, Pamoza started operating in three communities back in 2009 with a population of about 3,000. Since then, it has contiguously expanded, and as of 2020, the organization is serving twenty communities with a population of 32,000. It follows the person to person, household to household, village to village, and community to community approach in its holistic ministry, spreading the Gospel as well as facilitating community development. Hence, the mission of the

organization is to sustainably transform families in the rural communities the organization serves.

To carry out its mission, the organization engages in five main programs: (a) Christian Outreach and Discipleship; (b) Health and Nutrition; (c) Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment; (d) Education, Adult Literacy, and Vocational Training; and (e) Agriculture, Food Security, and Resource Care. At the household level, each program seeks to achieve a specific objective. Christian Outreach and Discipleship aims at improving household members’ character. Health and Nutrition seeks to improve health and nutritional well-being. The Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment program focuses on improving income while the Education, Literacy, and Vocational Training program seeks to improve a household’s educational attainment and vocational skills. Lastly, the Agriculture, Food Security, and Resource Care program aims at improving agricultural production and food security. This strategy has been dubbed the CHIEF (Character, Health, Income, Education, and Food Security) approach.

Through the CHIEF approach, Pamoza targets the most vulnerable households in a community. Pamoza identifies them with the help of community leaders then recruits Christian Outreach and Community Development (COCD) Facilitators from within the communities where the households are located. Each Facilitator works with 50 to 60 such households annually. The Facilitator engages in transformative dialogue with these households to improve their CHIEFs. With the help of various Pamoza experts (experts in the five programs mentioned above), COCD Facilitators start with assessing the CHIEF status of each vulnerable household followed by a long-term plan of action for the transformation of the household. Pamoza monitors and annually evaluates the household’s progress. An important evaluation factor is whether the household can sustain its CHIEF transformation process once initiated. When this is determined for a household, and this could take a number of years, the responsible COCD Facilitator engages in “reducing contact time”

with the household but still monitors its transformation progress. Households receiving less contact time are replaced by new households.



A COCD Facilitator Visiting a Household
in the CHIEF Program

While COCD Facilitators dialogue with household members to improve their CHIEFs, they also, with the help of the experts, facilitate the creation of groups around specific matters such as income generation, functional literacy, improved farming and livestock rearing practices, and Christian outreach activities (preaching outreaches, Bible study, prayer fellowship, family life skills, etc.). The objective here is to create what Wenger (1998) and Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) term communities of practice, that is, groups of people dialogically learning from one another in pursuing improvements in CHIEF. In fact, although CHIEF targets the vulnerable households, other households not under CHIEF have been reached in two main ways. First, any time the COCD Facilitator comes to visit and train a CHIEF household, other members of nearby households come and listen in then go to their households and implement what they have learned. Second, the other members of nearby households may not come to the training the Facilitator had with a CHIEF household but observes what the CHIEF household is doing then adopt those practices.

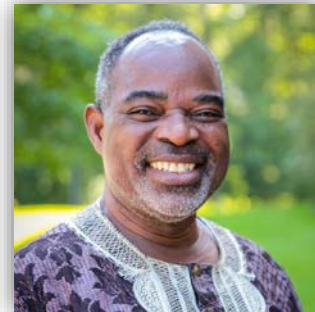
The CHIEF approach is a unique strategy in which a COCD Facilitator dialogically works with a household holistically, that is, addressing both spiritual and physical needs but also engaging in the contiguous process of moving to other households when a household has been set on a solid path in its improvement of its CHIEFs. Households attaining appreciable progress in their CHIEF areas are engaged in reaching out to other households, helping them to improve their CHIEFs. This is reminiscent of how disciples spread the Gospel—moving from home to home and community to community, encouraging those who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord to

build up one another and reach out to others in their proximity.

The CHIEF program is still in its infancy. We started it in late 2018. Pamoza is monitoring it carefully to make sure that participating households achieve long-term transformation.

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