



Chapter 12

A Call to Action: The Challenge to Change

Summary

The call to action and change is compelling. It is to define development as equitable wellbeing for all, to put the bottom poor high on the agenda, to recognize power as a central issue, and to give voice and priority to poor people. It is to enable poor women and men to achieve what they perceive as a better life. These basics underpin efforts to transform the conditions poor people experience, empowering them with freedom to choose and act.

The multiple dimensions of deprivation demand multiple interventions. The agenda for change requires actions to make the following shifts:

- ▶ *From material poverty to adequate assets and livelihoods.*
- ▶ *From isolation and poor infrastructure to access and services.*
- ▶ *From illness and incapability to health, information and education.*
- ▶ *From unequal and troubled gender relations to equity and harmony.*
- ▶ *From fear and lack of protection to peace and security.*
- ▶ *From exclusion and impotence to inclusion, organization and empowerment.*
- ▶ *From corruption and abuse to honesty and fair treatment.*

*Three other transformations are indicated: professional reorientation to starting with poor people's realities, institutional reorientation from dominating to facilitative behaviors, and personal commitment to bring about change in poor people's lives. Whether *Voices of the Poor* makes a difference depends on the actions or inaction of all touched by this study.*

Introduction

The people who read this book have the power to make a difference. Most of us are neither powerless nor poor. We can influence thinking, policy and practice. To a degree denied to the poor, we are free to make choices and changes. What should those changes be?

In writing this book we have tried to keep faith as messengers and interpreters, reporting and representing what participants said and shared. Our dilemma has been how much further to go. We believe that the poor women and men who participated in the study would want us to point to practical implications. Accordingly, in this final chapter we draw on poor people's recommendations as well as our own experience. Throughout this chapter we have illustrated the text with examples of poor people's recommendations, but make no attempt to cover every topic. We set out two major challenges and an agenda for action, which identifies seven themes.

The Challenge to Reflect: The Meaning of Development

Reflecting on the experiences of poor men and women has driven us to revisit the meaning of development. What is significant change, and what is good? And which changes, for whom, matter most?

Answers to these questions involve material, physical, social, psychological and spiritual dimensions. Historically many development professionals have given priority to the material aspect of people's lives. Important as this is, poor people's views of wellbeing, as we have seen, span wide and varied experiences and meanings. The words of a poor woman in Ethiopia illustrate some of the range and balance: "A better life for me is to be healthy, peaceful, and live in love without hunger. Love is more than anything. Money has no value in the absence of love." To encompass multiple dimensions, and to make space for poor people's own ideas of the good life means working toward wellbeing for all.

A key measure of development then becomes the enhanced wellbeing of those who have it least. Defined in their own terms, poor people have shown us how much a small change can mean to those who have very little. The increments in wellbeing that would mean much to the poor widow in Bangladesh—a full stomach, time for prayer, and a bamboo platform to sleep on—challenge us to change how we measure development. Basing the calculus of development on equity and wellbeing demands giving heavy emphasis to the bottom end of poverty. This argues for a reorientation of development priorities, practice and thinking. It reinforces the case for making the wellbeing of those who are worse off the touchstone for policy and practice.

The bottom poor, in all their diversity, are excluded, impotent, ignored and neglected; the bottom poor are a blind spot in development. In many

places, especially in Africa, their numbers are seen to be increasing. They are often difficult to reach and help. They find it difficult to help themselves. In Bangladesh they “hardly receive any help from neighbors.” Often they are untouched by government and NGO programs. They are not creditworthy. They do not have documents. They fall through safety nets. They are frequently sick. They cannot afford medical treatment. They are chronically short of food. They are exceptionally vulnerable and insecure. In urban areas they fear and hide from the police and officials who hound them. They subsist or die on the fringes of society.

The Challenge of Power: Whose Voice Counts?

Do people live equally here? Look at my fingers. Are they equal?

—A discussion group participant, Kajima, Ethiopia

A dog won't betray its master.

—A poor man, Ulugbek, Uzbekistan

Poor people lack voice and power. They do exercise agency but in very limited spheres of influence. In describing illbeing and the bad life, poor people, and especially women, often express powerlessness vis-à-vis employers, the state and markets; their inability to get a fair deal; their inability to take a stand against abuse, lying and being cheated; their inability to access market opportunities. To stand up against those on whom you and your family depend is risky and can even be a matter of life and death. Differences in power between women and men and between the poor and the nonpoor affect opportunities and outcomes in countless interactions.

The voices that count most are those of the powerful and wealthy. It is they who make, influence and implement policy. To make a difference poor people must be able to make their voices heard in policy and have representation in decisionmaking forums. This implies changes in power relations and behavior. Organizations of the poor become very important means to changing power relations. Investing in poor people's organizations requires shifts of mind-set and orientation among professionals and institutions. The inspiring examples of champions who serve the interests of the poor show what individuals can do to ensure that the voices of the poor are heard and acted upon. In today's "wired" world the opportunities for sharing the realities of poor people's lives, for changing mind-sets and for ensuring that poor people's voices are heard have never been greater. Coalitions representing poor people's organizations are needed to ensure that the voices of the poor are heard and reflected in decisionmaking at the local, national and global levels.

The Agenda for Change

A person doesn't have the strength or power to change anything, but if the overall system changed, things would be better.

—A poor man, Sarajevo, Bosnia

This study's starting point is poor people's own analysis. Their priorities differ and are specific by group and context. These differences underscore the importance of participatory analysis by diverse groups of poor people and decentralized action to fit their varied priorities. At the same time, poor people have much in common, pointing to more widely applicable policies and practices.

The dimensions of wellbeing and illbeing are many. While priorities vary by location, the study gives added weight to poor people's voices crying out against the agony of hunger and sickness, the deprivations of lack of work, the anxiety of insecurity, the injustice of discrimination, the frustrations of powerlessness, the denial of opportunity to children and much else. The questions are what should be done and who should do it. Here poor people provide some guidance.

Poor people call for access to opportunities, decent wages, strong organizations of their own and a better and more active state. They call for systemic change. They want more government, not less—government on which they have influence and with which they can partner in different ways. They look to government to provide services fundamental to their wellbeing. Poor people's problems cut across sectoral divides. They challenge us to think and plan beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries while still remaining responsive to local realities. This requires institutions that are more decentralized, facilitative and accountable to poor women and men.

In reviewing what poor people explicitly called for, as well as our own analysis, we have identified seven themes for change. Practical measures for implementing change will depend on national and local contexts, but progress across these themes is an urgent priority for poor people around the world. They are:

- ▶ From material poverty to adequate assets and livelihoods.
- ▶ From isolation and poor infrastructure to access and services.
- ▶ From illness and incapability to health, information and education.
- ▶ From unequal and troubled gender relations to equity and harmony.
- ▶ From fear and lack of protection to peace and security.
- ▶ From exclusion and impotence to inclusion, organization and empowerment.
- ▶ From corruption and abuse to honesty and fair treatment.

1. From Material Poverty to Adequate Assets and Livelihoods

Poverty and destitution are part and parcel of our lives.

—Participant, discussion group of women, Kowerani
Masasa, Malawi

Every day there are more unemployed; every day one sees more men around the neighborhood.

—Participant, discussion group of men and women,
Moreno, Argentina

There is great insecurity now. You can't make any plans.

—Participant, discussion group of men and women,
Kalofer, Bulgaria

In defining poverty and insecurity, poor people speak about hunger, their precarious lives, lack of assets, their limited ability to cope with shocks and their lack of access to loans and capital. Even where poverty has decreased, as in Vietnam, poor people say their insecurity has increased. With some exceptions, poor people report that their economic opportunities have declined in the 1990s. Many blame governments for mismanaging the economy, for privatization, high taxes, and inflation; for declines in affordability of agricultural inputs; for distant markets; for lack of cheap credit; for corrupt services; or simply for lack of care for the poor.

In this environment, poor people's livelihood strategies are largely in the informal economy and frequently consist of a patchwork of low-paying, risk-prone and often back-breaking work. Poor people offer many recommendations specific to their contexts (see box 12.1). Moving away from poverty to a life that includes assets and livelihood security will require three sets of actions: fuel the economy from below; support producer organizations of the poor and provide social protection; and enhance access to savings, credit and venture capital services.

a. Fuel the Economy from Below

Many participants feel that economic opportunities have bypassed them. In Indonesia and Thailand in particular, they are acutely aware of the ill effects of macroeconomic decline. Proper macroeconomic policies and programs are clearly essential, but stronger links are required to the micro level where poor people live and work. Poor people propose nurturing the local economy through a variety of ways including building access roads; having better and fairer access to markets for rural producers; building village food-storage barns; stopping the practice of giving rich people rights to buy or use common property resources; ensuring minimum crop prices until the economy

stabilizes (former Soviet countries); redistributing land; removing oppressive rules governing the urban informal sector; and encouraging rural small and large-scale industries and factories (see also box 12.1).

b. Support Producer Organizations of the Poor and Provide Social Protection

As individuals we cannot do a thing.

—From a discussion group of poor kilim weavers,
Foua, Egypt

The informal sector is cut-throat, fragmented and extremely diverse. In rural economies, poor farmers are often isolated from each other. Membership-based organizations of the poor that build solidarity among informal workers, small farmers and other producers may improve conditions for the poor. By working together, poor people's associations can obtain better prices for goods, buy in bulk, share information, and organize to influence municipal and state regulations affecting vending, public transport and so forth. Examples of people organizing include farmers' groups, fishermen's groups, tailors' associations, marketing cooperatives and credit associations.

Most informal sector workers are casual workers with no direct access to government-provided social security even where it exists. Innovative micro-insurance schemes are needed to protect poor workers.

c. Enhance Access to Savings, Credit and Venture Capital Services

While much has been learned about microcredit lending systems, they still do not reach many poor people. Access to credit can be difficult due to collateral requirements, rigid repayment schedules, loan amounts that are too small, and corruption among lenders. Shopkeepers and money-lenders, despite their high interest rates, are greatly valued for giving loans for consumption, for not having bothersome procedures, and for allowing payments to be made in kind, including in labor. Participatory research is needed to guide institutional innovation to channel credit through appropriate mechanisms to fit local requirements. To establish such microcredit lending programs may require retraining field workers and changing incentives so that the programs' success is judged by the quality of their interactions with the borrowers as well as by collection rates.

Poor people often point out that they lack access to capital to start new business ventures. There is a need for venture capital funds for poor people.

Box 12.1 Poor People's Recommendations for Improving Livelihoods and Building Assets

Develop local industries and services to reduce unemployment

Participants from Nampeya Village, Malawi have many suggestions for bringing jobs into their areas including rice milling and packaging, tobacco handling centers and sugar making plants; and loan schemes for minibuses so the village can be connected to urban centers more reliably. They say that such changes would mean that they might "at least be employed as either guards, cleaners or moppers."

In Munamalgasvewa, Sri Lanka the poor want help to start businesses in mat making and other reed handicrafts, and for repair shops for radios, televisions, motorcycles, bicycles and two-wheeled tractors.

Change municipal regulation to reduce difficulties in street vending

Women in many countries speak about municipal regulations that made vending trade difficult. Women recommend organization and joining hands to fight municipal authorities. In Kaoseng, Thailand a woman community leader who learned about community organizing a decade earlier at the threat of house demolitions and evictions organized to protest municipal parking regulations that affected access to their fish markets and their sales.

Invest in people's organizations

"We want to form our own organization; our own, protecting our own rights," says a Roma group from Krasna Poliana in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Expand access to formal credit

In Jaffna, Sri Lanka poor people say that "to improve the future living standards of the village, they expect the two lending institutions, the United Currency Society and the Social Development Center...to extend a helping hand by encouraging savings and giving loans when necessary."

Act on many fronts

In Dibdibe Wajtu Peasant Association, in Ethiopia, people say that opportunities would improve

- ▶ *"...if there is the chance for employment..."*
- ▶ *"...if there are credit facilities, the farmer can use them to increase production and improve his life."*
- ▶ *"...if the widowed and landless women are given some sort of vocational training, they can make it a means of living."*
- ▶ *"...if the farmer is given some sort of training in the use of money he can save some of his earnings to use it in days of difficulty."*
- ▶ *"...if people who suffer from dense settlement were able to move and settle in fertile, unsettled areas."*

Provide day care

In Novo Horizonte, Brazil participants ask for day care because "it is very important, especially for the mothers who have to work. It also could be a source of leisure for children."

2. From Isolation and Poor Infrastructure to Access and Services

If we get a road we would get everything else: community center, employment, post office, water, telephone.

—Participant, group of young women,
Little Bay, Jamaica

The lack of capital is related to the road condition that does not allow people to sell farming products.

—Participant, group of poor women, Waikanabu, Indonesia

The authorities never come here.

—A woman, Asociación 10 de Agosto, Ecuador

We can solve some of the problems ourselves, such as the problem of the dirty streets, but how can we solve the potable water and lake problems?

—A youth, El Mataria, Egypt

Poor people are frequently disadvantaged in where they live and work, and in access to basic services. Often they are geographically isolated, whether in slums or remote rural areas, with roads, transport, telecommunications, lighting, access to information and markets that are inadequate or lacking altogether. Schools, clinics and hospitals are far away and of low quality. Shelter, water, sanitation and fuel are inadequate and unsafe. Many farm families seek livelihoods on marginal lands. Many, both urban and rural, are insecure in their tenure of land and the plots on which they live. And they are exposed to environmental hazards, such as floods, droughts, fires, pollution and epidemics.

These conditions exacerbate poverty. It takes poor people longer than others, and often very much more energy, to fetch water, wash, find and collect fuel, maintain their shelter, get to market to buy and sell, get information, gain access to government offices, contact friends and relatives, get treatment for sickness or accidents, and in slums even to go to the toilet. Conversely, reliable, convenient and accessible infrastructure reduces time and energy required. Those who benefit are likely to be disproportionately female because of gender responsibilities of running households and, increasingly, meeting household expenses as well. Not surprisingly many poor people's recommendations focus on improving their physical environment (see box 12.2).

a. Assign Greater Priority to Basic Infrastructure

Reliable housing, water, roads, sanitation, and energy provide critical foundations for households and community development. The contrast between slums and more prosperous parts of many cities is acute. The major benefits

Box 12.2 Poor People's Recommendations for Improving Places Where They Live

Improved roads and transport

"Roads have been repaired by villagers from time to time, but a permanent road needs to be built by the government."

—Discussion group, Sohrai, India

"Government and moneylenders should consider introducing loan schemes so that we can buy mini buses."

—Discussion group, Nampeya village, Malawi

Partnerships in sanitation

"If it were not for the help of the politicians supplying construction materials so that we can fix the sewers, the number of diseases would be much higher."

—Discussion group participant in Padre Jordano, Brazil

Tenure and security

"This problem could have been fixed. Due to the unresolved legal status of the neighborhood, we miss out on many opportunities from some organizations because they are afraid to invest in illegal areas."

—Participant, discussion group of men, Atucucho, Ecuador

Slum dwellers from Chittagong, Bangladesh say their insecurity can be solved if they can settle in a permanent place where there are no fears of eviction.

from adequate infrastructure have been stressed many times, as by this group of poor men in Ethiopia: "If we had received government assistance in the areas of water and electricity, it would have created a great deal of opportunity for us to improve our lives." As the many examples across countries show, poor people make valiant efforts to solve their problems, but often with limited long-term success resulting in poor people paying more than the rich for services. Provision of sustainable basic services requires new working and financial partnerships between governments and poor communities. Encouraging investments in improving infrastructure services by poor people requires giving poor people security of tenure.

b. Reduce Seasonal Risks; Strengthen Environmental Management

Many poor people and poor communities are located in environmentally vulnerable areas, such as steep hillsides, floodplains, arid lands, and unhealthy, polluted areas—all of which are more vulnerable to extreme weather. Poor

people often live and work in such places because better lands are unaffordable. Where other options are limited, measures to protect against floods, fires, riverbank erosion, landslides and many different forms of pollution are needed, along with interventions to foster better conservation of soils, forests, sources of water and fish stocks.

Community-based processes are needed to guide land and resource use planning and regulations so as to bring meaningful benefits to poor communities. For example, in Khaliajuri, Bangladesh people propose that if the government or NGOs would build a permanent embankment, erosion would slow and livelihood opportunities would increase. In Kaoseng, Thailand participants recommend that the government should enforce its bans on illegal fishing equipment and reduce the release of wastewater from processing plants.

3. From Illness and Incapability to Health, Information and Education

Before, everyone could get health care, but now everyone just prays to God that they don't get sick because everywhere they ask for money.

—A discussion group participant, Vares,
Bosnia and Herzegovina

It is difficult to take the children to and from the clinic. It's costly and stressful; sometimes it takes a whole day.

—A woman, Little Bay, Jamaica

Because we've had no schooling we are almost illiterate... Store owners cheat us, because the Indians don't know how to count or anything else. They buy at the prices they want and pay less. They cheat us because we are not educated.

—Participant, discussion group of woman,
Asociación 10 de Agosto, Ecuador

Physical incapacities include hunger, weakness, illness, exhaustion and disabilities, and they exacerbate poverty of time and energy. Other incapacities are lack of information, education, literacy and skills. On the positive side, wellbeing includes health, strength, education and skills, all of which empower.

The importance to poor people of access to good and affordable health care would be difficult to exaggerate. The body is a poor person's main asset. Yet it is those who most need strong bodies for work who are most exposed to sickness and accidents and least able to obtain or afford treatment. Illness, injury and death stand out as causes of poverty. Innovative means of providing protection during health and other income-related shocks is greatly needed. Some of poor people's recommendations are reflected in Box 12.3.

Complementary interventions that help poor people overcome time and energy poverty will also protect the poor people's most important energy system—their own bodies.

Literacy, gaining skills and education are valued and seen as a means out of poverty. Skills training is stressed for starting micro and small businesses. Education is less valued when an economy is in trouble, and more when it is prosperous. Despite their belief in the potential value of education, the poor struggle with its cost and question its quality, language of instruction, and relevance to future livelihood.

a. Expand Access to Curative Medicine

Preventive medicine is important, but it is curative medicine that the poor emphasize. Catastrophic illness devastates. Poor people know the effects of being sick and unable to work, when the body flips from asset to liability, and of the costs of getting good treatment. Poor people need low-cost health care,

Box 12.3 Poor People's Recommendations for Health Services

Be kind

"The doctors should be kind and polite; they have taken a special oath, this is their business. They have to be welcoming and to talk with everybody, to listen to one's problems. But they are not. Most of them are quite rude; they make the people wait for several hours...."

—A discussion group of men and women, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Ethics, traditional healers and citizen monitoring of hospitals

"Hospital staff should stick to their professional ethics and values. They are no longer reliable. Drugs and essential equipment are in short supply. We hear the government has sold off some of the public enterprises. The money realized from this exercise could be used for procuring drugs for our hospitals. The government should consider strengthening links with traditional healers who could be an alternative, but their practices are unhygienic. Finally, the government should consider the involvement of the public in day-to-day management of these hospitals. We should be able to offer our views...if we are granted this opportunity, we shall not heap all the blame on government for substandard services in our hospitals."

—Discussion group, Kowerani Massasa, Malawi

Expand poor people's access to health care

In Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam, participants propose that the government provide health insurance for farmers, health examinations free of charge for poor and elderly people, education about health care and family planning, and free family planning services. People also express a need for more sufficient stocks at commune health stations.

while the poorest cannot afford even low costs. Improving access to curative services, minimizing travel costs, reducing waiting times, and making treatment affordable for poor people would prevent much impoverishment.

Rather than preferential treatment for the rich, participants in Ha Tinh, Vietnam probably speak for many in urging “preferential treatment for poor households to help promote access to health services...”

Poor people resent and are deterred by the rude and callous way health professionals often treat them. Sri Lanka may be a source of lessons, standing out as a country where poor people, with few exceptions, speak with appreciation of government hospitals, good and polite doctors, and free hospital treatment.

b. Provide Health Insurance

In Vietnam poor people say farmers should receive health insurance. Similarly in Borg Meghezal, Egypt poor people consider an efficient health insurance system as critical. Health insurance for the poor is an area for learning from current practices and for innovation.

c. Support Access to Information

It would be good if we had a telephone here in the collective center or at least if we could phone from the post office....

—Discussion group, Bratunac, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Over and over again, poor people mention their isolation from information; information about programs of assistance, their rights, job contacts, how banks work; government plans that affect their lives directly—for example, plans to move people from an embankment; prices; NGO, village government and local government activities.

In addition to information dissemination through mass media, poor people’s connectivity to each other and to sources of information can be greatly enhanced through access to communication and information technology. Rural information technology centers, cellular telephones and Internet access can change poor people’s negotiating power even while deep structural inequities exist.

d. Make Education Accessible and Relevant

Both government and NGOs can arrange better education systems ... both for functional as well as technical education.

—A discussion group, Chittagong, Bangladesh

In ranking community priorities, poor people in community after community indicate that they value education and technical training as keys to a better future for themselves and especially for their children. In many

countries, and particularly across Africa, school-related costs and the distance to schools are serious and sometimes insuperable problems. Quality and relevance of education are also issues. Eliminating direct costs of schooling, including costs of school supplies and uniforms, and offsetting indirect costs, such as loss of children's labor through scholarships, would encourage many more poor families to send their children to school. Implementing such pro-poor measures in a resource-constrained environment requires creative context-specific solutions. Across different contexts, poor people said participation in school management made teachers show up for work.

4. From Unequal and Troubled Gender Relations to Equity and Harmony

Many men have been retrenched, are jobless, and do not have any steady source of income. As a result, women have assumed the role of breadwinner in many households.

—Research team in Kowerani Masasa, Malawi

Before, it was clear that the woman is to keep the house and take care of the family, while the man was earning the daily bread. Now the woman buys and sells stuff irrespective of the weather and earns the income for the family, while the man is sitting at home and takes care of the children, fulfilling the traditional women's work. This is not right; this is not good.

—An elderly man, Kenesh, Kyrgyz Republic

It's because of unemployment and poverty that most men in this community beat their wives. We have no money to look after them.

—A man, Teshie, Ghana

Exclusion based on gender remains widespread and entrenched despite exchanging laws in some countries. This is evident in gender roles at the household and community levels and in poor women's unequal access to livelihood resources and services. With some exceptions, men are viewed as the major decisionmakers in community affairs.

At the household level, however, people perceive major changes to be under way in gender relations. With increased economic hardship and a decline in poor men's traditional livelihood strategies, more poor women have had to make their way into the informal economy, primarily in low-paying and often menial work. In many societies, for women to work outside the home violates social norms; it is a source of tension and shame, especially when the primary reason is men's unemployment. These sweeping changes are placing enormous stress on households.

Poor people mention domestic violence in many forms with great frequency. Physical abuse of women in the household remains widespread. While it is in decline in some communities, in other communities, physical violence is reported to be increasing. This increase is linked to women's work outside the home, a violation of traditional norms, and a threat to men's sense of masculine identity. The decrease in domestic violence in some areas is linked to women's greater income-earning ability and willingness to walk out of abusive relations and support themselves, awareness raising done by NGOs and churches, and occasionally police support. Many communities also report harassment and abuse of girls and women at the community level and in the workplace. Examples of poor people's recommendations are reported in Box 12.4.

Existing gender relations in society and in the household affect poverty interventions. This fact needs to be part of the calculus of design and evaluation of policies and programs. Improvement in gender relations within households and in society can result in enormous gains in wellbeing. Achieving such improvement requires change in social norms, a gender approach to development, psychological support to both men and women, support to women's groups and appropriate legal reforms.

a. Launch Campaigns on Gender Relations

There may be no other domain than gender relations that suffers such neglect by governments, international agencies and the private sector as gender relations. Mass media campaigns are needed to change social norms

Box 12.4 Poor People's Recommendations to Reduce Gender Inequity

Increase legal action against domestic abuse

A group of women from the poor urban community of Twashuka Shanty Compound in Zambia propose that the government should provide police to deal with murders, wife-batterings, sexual abuse of female children, wife-killings, rape and assault. They say "the police should stop being corrupt" and take seriously the problems of sexual abuse of female children.

Strengthen awareness about dowry

Participants from Khaliajuri, Bangladesh feel that legal measures alone cannot end the practice of dowry and they recommend campaigns to raise public awareness on the devastating problems it creates. They suggest that the government should broadcast awareness programs through different media, for instance, illustrating dowry problems with real cases. Rather than broadcasting the different punishments for taking dowry, they should indicate how a poor father becomes landless by giving dowry.

for better and more adaptive gender relations and to help boys and men to redefine masculinity. Such campaigns would entail actively encouraging men, where appropriate, to adapt to and enjoy new domestic roles. Prominent, powerful and popular men can and should set examples as role models.

b. Mainstream Gender-Sensitive Approaches

Over and over again women have been left out of programs of assistance—and influence over design of programs—from agricultural extension to government-provided loans or training. In addition women are participating less in community activities as they take on new income-earning roles. The backlash against women's small and painful gains, and the struggles, depression, and frustration felt by men, call for a gender-sensitive approach to move out of textbooks and into the practice of development. By implication, then, all interventions must take into account the intermeshing of women's and men's lives and the impact of interventions on equity and peace in the household.

Social roles and identity are closely intertwined. Rapid changes exact an emotional and psychological toll with economic and social consequences. Both men and women, in separate and mixed groups, need physical and social space to gather and talk about themselves, their society, and their loss and grief to enable them to function more effectively in a changing society.

c. Support Women's Groups

In some countries women's groups (for example, the *samity* women's group created by NGOs in Bangladesh) stand out as making a difference in poor women's struggles to earn a living in dignity. Depending on the cultural context, women's groups are powerful ways of reaching poor women, building confidence and establishing economic security.

d. Undertake Legal Reform

Discrimination against females and denial of their human rights are still widely embodied in both law and custom. Legal reform, where it has not taken place, to establish equal rights of inheritance for women, including rights to land and other property, must be a high priority. Equally important is extending legal aid to women. The customary despoliation of widows, their humiliation and impoverishment, cry out for both legal and social redress. The limitations of the law are evident, though, from India, where dowry is illegal but widely practiced. The way dowry impoverishes poor families who have daughters, and reinforces discrimination against females throughout their lives, is again evident from case studies. The many efforts to change such customs and their severely discriminatory effects deserve support.

5. *From Fear and Lack of Protection to Peace and Security*

The police have become the rich people's stick against common people.

—Discussion group of men and women,
urban Uzbekistan

I do not know whom to trust, the police or the criminals. Our public safety is ourselves. We work and hide indoors.

—A woman, Sacadura Cabral, Brazil

Even before the war, there was plundering and theft, but that was a herald to the war. Before the war, places were well lit. People worked and had money...those most in need were protected, but now nothing.

—Discussion group, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

We are dying from these greedy people who are stealing our food.

—A man from the Serenje District of Zambia

Security is peace of mind and the possibility to sleep relaxed.

—A woman, El Gawaber, Egypt

In many countries in both rural and urban areas poor people report a decline in social connectedness together with increases in crime, lawlessness, selfishness and violence. Although there are differences in scale and intensity, the problem of declining public safety as an element of increasing insecurity is mentioned in almost every country, in both rural and urban areas. Breakdown in social cohesion is reflected in conflict and violence within the home as well. Many of the poor link these trends to decreases in economic opportunities, increased competition for resources and poor government policies. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia the decline also is linked to the political and economic transition.

As a result of economic stress and erosion of traditional family support and government safety nets, poor people feel less able to protect themselves from shocks and stresses. These include natural disasters, crime, theft, illness, price fluctuations and unemployment.

The police emerge not as sources of help and security, but rather of harm, risk and impoverishment. While there are some exceptions, including in Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and Zambia, in many places the police are considered a necessary evil, vigilantes and criminals. Poor people's recommendations focus in different ways on enhancing safety, security and peace (box 12.5).

Civil wars based on clan rivalries and ethnicity in several countries have brought untold suffering to the poor, and even after years of peace, life has

Box 12.5 Poor People's Recommendations to Enhance Peace and Security

Community bonds

We have two choices: either we sink together or get out of the mud together.... No one individual or group can make it alone, in our situation.

—Discussion group of men, Qoyta Village, Somaliland

Police reform

The government "should take the necessary steps to protect them from the harassment of police as well as outsider hoodlums." If the police "actively performed their duty" then these problems would go away.

—Slum dwellers, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Lasting peace and unity

"The first step in solving their problems is to achieve permanent peace, stability, and reconciliation regionally and in the country. Secondly, to agree on competent and representative leadership, who should work for the common aim and bring people together."

—Discussion group participants, Togdheer, Somaliland

Peace of mind and security in old age and in crisis

Pension schemes should "provide supplies to people with low pensions, and restore rates for those with average pensions; open discount stores with regulated prices for pensioners; provide adequate compensation for inflation."

—A discussion group of pensioners, Krasna Poliana, Bulgaria

To achieve security, participants in a women's discussion group from Mtamba village, Malawi, said, will require building up household assets. A household should have:

- ▶ "Access to short-term loans and ability to pay back the loans...."
- ▶ "Livestock that it can sell to buy food and other basic necessities like soap...."
- ▶ "Surplus food from its own stocks."

not returned to prewar standards. In Bosnia, Somaliland and Sri Lanka poor people speak of very slow and difficult recoveries and lingering tensions.

a. Invest in Building Social Cohesion

Every society has processes of building social cohesion through a variety of mechanisms: celebrations, community sports, community works, conflict resolution councils, the village headman in Malawi, the Community Council

and Age Groups in Nigeria, and the Save the Town Association in Kok Yangak in the Kyrgyz Republic—all are examples of ways local organizations take action to make life more livable. In rural Malawi and Zambia, people have organized neighborhood watch groups to curb crime. In communities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, opportunities to collectively grieve over sudden and large losses may be particularly helpful in easing the cost of moving forward. The case here is for encouraging processes that support community solidarity and bridging social capital or social interaction across social groups.

b. Invest in Social Protection

Living on the edge, despite hard work, poor men and women have little resilience to bounce back after disasters hit. A social protection approach broadly defined should focus on building assets of the poor and increasing their reserves and resilience in the face of crisis. There is need for programs that protect poor men and women from the effects of human-made and natural crises and the effects of life-cycle changes.

c. Undertake Police Reform

The crisis in police brutality, with “protectors” becoming the problem, calls out for solutions. Poor people need and want the police, but good police. In some areas poor people feel that the police are not to blame for their failure to deal with criminals. They point out that the police are poorly paid, their lives are at risk when tracking criminals and these risks become higher each year as criminals become better armed.

One option is community policing, where the police discuss and agree with community residents on a common protocol for police action. This approach has transformed community-police relations and has brought down crime in some urban neighborhoods. Another tactic may be to increase women police: in Jamaica the only police officer mentioned who was accessible to the poor was a woman; in Brazil the poor speak highly of some women’s police stations, while others are reported to be underfunded. Other measures to encourage and enable the police to protect—not persecute—the poor could include systems of police accountability, better pay and backup from the criminal justice system. Yet other solutions should be sought from experience gained with police reform wherever this has taken place.

d. Strengthen Conflict Mediation and Resolution

After civil war or riots have ended, rebuilding infrastructure is relatively easy. Mourning loss, healing deep hatreds and wounds, and building collaboration across social divides are, however, extremely difficult. Building

peace at all levels requires skills and expertise in conflict mediation and resolution as well as counseling. While reforming the judiciary is important, in many countries where government has little presence in rural areas, traditional forums for dispute resolution play critical roles. In Somaliland the *Guurti*, a forum to resolve disputes between clans, is ranked highly by most people and credited with bringing and maintaining peace to communities. In the Bihin area a committee of elders, which formed following the signing of the Peace Charter in 1993, regulates water sharing during the dry season and resolves disputes over land use.

Solving community problems through joint action across previously warring ethnic lines is difficult. In Bosnia and Herzegovina NGOs are working through the Center for Civil Society in southeastern Europe to build cooperative relations across community groups, among traditional leaders, and with local authorities. Community-based projects across ethnic and social groups, as well as conflict mediation efforts and skills training, need to be supported. In some countries, the ability to resolve conflicts is cited as an important criterion in rating institutions. In Egypt poor people speak of the ability of traditional councils to resolve disputes; in Ethiopia the *omda* (the traditional mayor) is valued for skills in dispute resolution so that “only if the matter is very serious, like a murder” is it referred to the police.

6. From Exclusion and Impotence to Inclusion, Organization and Empowerment

We all know that if you are at the bottom, you will be the object of aggression, and we are afraid of those on the top. The people cannot gather together and put them in their place.

—Discussion group of men and women, Etropole, Bulgaria

The responsibility for the problem is 90 percent on the government, but we vote badly, we do not monitor, we don't demand our rights, and we are not active to demand a correct action by the government.

—Discussion group of men and women,
Morro da Conceição, Brazil

Poor people's evaluations of institutions show that by and large they are excluded from participation in decisionmaking and in equal sharing of benefits from government programs as well as from those of NGOs. The poor want desperately to have their voices heard, to make decisions, and not to always receive the law handed down from above. They are tired of being asked to participate in government projects with low or no returns. Some of their suggestions are reflected in box 12.6.

Organizations of poor people at the local level are critical if they are to influence decisionmaking at the local, national or global levels.

**Box 12.6 Poor People's Recommendations for Inclusion,
Organization and Empowerment**

"We should all live in unity. It is then that the village can be developed. If we have good relationships with our neighbors and the relatives they will help us in times of need, and help in the activities of the village. We help them when we can in order to maintain good relationships. We help them to obtain loans...."

—A group of poor men, Munamalgasvewa, Sri Lanka

"The problem of lack of unity can be solved by outsiders coming to give advice and criticism to the community"

—A discussion group of men and women, Ruamsamakee, Thailand

"The main problem comes from discrimination. If you're Gypsy, you can't find a job. There are skilled workers—tailors, builders, hairdressers—but even they won't be given a job because they are Gypsy. We need equality. You should be able to travel abroad and look for a job there."

—A discussion group of older men, Sofia, Bulgaria

"It is good for an institution to let people be free to make the decisions...we must be free to air our views."

—A discussion group of men and women, Mbwadzulu Village, Malawi

"We can only attain quality of life through our own mobilization. We must have education and information in order to have our project to improve quality of life."

—A poor man in Sacadura, Brazil

"The life of the community improved because of the interest of the residents. The acquisition of invaded land, the construction of brick and cement houses, school, day cares, public health clinic, paved streets were gained through the initiative of residents."

—Community leader, Bode, Brazil

"An outside facilitator may be needed to assist in galvanizing the community to attract the attention of outside policy makers for support to remove the growing poverty of the area."

—An adult male, Thompson Pen, Jamaica

a. Create the Legal Framework for Participation

The framework for grassroots democracy, the right to participate, must be enshrined in law. This has to include rules about public disclosure of information; freedom of association, speech and the press; freedom to form organizations; and devolution of authority and finances to the local level. Institutional rules and incentives are needed to translate laws into effective

governance structures. The challenge is to create propoor government institutions accountable to the poor.

While legal frameworks create the space for action, whether or not laws are effectively put into practice depends on many factors, including the local capacity to organize and mobilize around the new rights enshrined by law. In Horenco, Bolivia the implementation of the Law of Popular Participation is complicated by divisions within the community. In Ha Tinh Province of Vietnam, in one commune participants say, “All decisions are top-down. For example, decisions on contributions, fees, taxes, and the like. All the people could do is what they are required to do as informed by the village manager.” These examples underscore the point that while a legal framework may be necessary, it is not in itself sufficient. A key precondition is organized communities that can participate in devolved authority structures and keep local governments accountable.

b. Support Local Organizational Capacity

If we aren't organized and we don't unite, we can't ask for anything.

—Participant, discussion group of women, Florencio Varela, Argentina

Quite often poor people feel that they are “made to participate” in government programs. They often express the general sentiment, “We are asked to attend meetings, but our participation makes little difference.” When programs are implemented, the poor once again are left out. “In the end they would see and feel that the activities were not transparently implemented,” say the researchers from Galih Pakuwon, Indonesia.

In many countries the study found that people trust their own solidarity groups and associations to be most responsive to their needs and priorities. In Somaliland clan elders resolve conflicts between clans; in Nchimishi, Zambia a neighborhood health committee “swings into action once there is an outbreak of dysentery.” These organizations provide the foundations for mobilization and active participation in grassroots democracy. Organizations of the poor need to be strengthened to participate effectively in local governance. This capacity building is critical if laws are to be translated into human dignity and freedom for the poor. NGOs and the private sector have important roles to play, provided it can be ensured that they are accountable to the poor. Local organizational capacity is a key element in building grassroots democracy, but without “bridging social capital” to link similar social groups across communities, or groups with complementary resources (such as NGOs, the private sector, or the state), organizing local groups by itself is unlikely to move poor people out of poverty. Organizational capacity building requires long-term commitment and long-term financing; otherwise, outsiders are liable to take over local priorities and leadership.

7. From Corruption and Abuse to Honesty and Fair Treatment

There is much bitterness, especially in the thought that any opportunities that may come will be taken by the rich and they could never find a wasta, or middleman, to enable them to find a better or more permanent job. If they have a right, they cannot take it because they cannot afford a lawyer. If the poor go to the police station to accuse a richer man, he is afraid: "My accusation may turn out in the favor of the rich and against me. But if we are equal, I may have justice."

—Researchers, Dahshour, Egypt

The municipality collects donations, and then they share it among themselves.

—A discussion group participant, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The problems of corruption, "connections," and violation of basic human rights with impunity is voiced over and over again by poor people in many countries. They experience corruption in their daily lives: corruption in the distribution of seeds, medicines and social assistance for the destitute and vulnerable; in getting loans; in getting teachers to teach; in customs and border crossings; in the construction of roads; in getting permission to move in and out of cities or stay in certain areas; in street and market trading; and in identity cards. Even humanitarian assistance is often reported to be waylaid. For many, access to justice and courts is a distant dream because of lack of information, distance from the courts and a strong belief based on experience that only money buys justice. Poor people's suggestions are reported in box 12.7.

a. Recognize Corruption as a Core Poverty Issue

Societal norms about corruption being expected and tolerated must change. While tackling the problem on a sectoral basis is important, societal norms about corruption must shift to the expectation of honesty and justice. No single agency can tackle or resolve the issue, but seeds must be sown widely to create global and local social movements against corruption, large and small. The moral authority of the religions of the world can be a powerful means to bring honesty and justice back into public and private life.

b. Provide Legal Aid and Build Awareness of Rights

There are four dragons: law court, prosecutor's office, khokimiat [highest state authority] and head of police. Nobody can get anything until they are satiated.

—A discussion group of men and women, Uzbekistan

Box 12.7 Poor People's Recommendations for Better Public, Market and Civic Institutions

Anticorruption laws

"The only way of improving the functioning of the state is to vote new, more severe laws against all forms of corruption and the politicians should think more about the nation than about their own interests."

—Discussion group participant, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Fair treatment

"No matter what kind of institution it is, there should not be special privileges for anyone; help should be given without needing connections."

—A discussion group of men and women, Paján, Ecuador

Work directly with communities

"We would wish that government or donor agencies intervene directly and establish health care, market and employment facilities because we fear that monies meant for these purposes would go into private pockets without completing the job. We will be willing to contribute labor during construction."

—A group of young males, Ikot Idem, Nigeria

A caring President

"If only it was possible to address the president directly, I am certain that he would never deny the request and the most effective help could have been expected from him. The President gives his support in the most difficult moments."

—Discussion group participant, Andijan, Uzbekistan

Poor men and women need legal assistance and need to be educated about the law and their rights. Legal assistance and legal education have to be made available at the local level and on a long-term basis for poor people to have confidence in justice without fear of repercussions. Poor people will need protection to ensure that those who first dare to claim their rights in courts do not have to pay a high price in terms of their own lives, destruction of their property, or harm to family members. A woman in Uzbekistan, who taught herself about the law to get her son released from jail, says, "I am not afraid of anybody. If you know the law, you are secure."

c. Invest in Civic and Media Monitoring

Transparency through right-to-information movements, including transparency about budgets, combined with use of the media, has a key part to play. Change in this arena will entail investment in television, radio and other

media; training and support to journalists; publicity of corruption statistics; creation of citizen “scorecards” on corruption in particular agencies; support to allies and activists at the local level; and use of information technology to publicize specific cases of corruption and to make heroes of “clean” traders, officials and politicians. In Russia, in the city of Magadan, local media are viewed as a force to battle corruption: “They trust those reporters who make local news. They revealed the facts of corruption among the municipal offices, they told of the money from the local budget that was spent by the mayor on his own needs.” To gain legitimacy and protection, broad-based coalitions across communities and countries can deepen change and support local initiatives.

d. Create Downward Accountability

Some of the best institutional performance was reported where there was downward accountability to community groups. In education, when given the opportunity through parent associations, poor parents demand value for their money and hold schoolteachers accountable for their performance. When health workers are accountable to communities and there are mechanisms for feedback, delivery of health care improves. In Nova Califórnia, a *favela* in Brazil, the city initiative Saúde em Casa [Health in the Home] provides health services such as dentists, clinics and psychologists in mobile offices to communities. It emerges as one of the three best and most important institutions. Saúde em Casa is considered an institution with good service, as much because it is in the community as because it solves health problems or refers them to be solved by other institutions. When asked which institutions the community has greater control over, the people said, “We have more control over the Association...over Saúde em Casa...the community has the telephone number, the cell phone, the home phone number, and can complain from home in case of bad care from the Saúde em Casa doctors.”

e. Campaign and Make Heroes of Honest and Caring Officials

Campaigns against corruption should be combined with acknowledgment and appreciation for honest and caring officials. Find and publicize those who behave well, especially those who improve conditions by cleaning up corruption and those who are outstanding in their spirit of service. Make them role models for their peers. Reward them. Promote them. Publicize performance standards and inform users, so service performers can be held accountable.

In the *favela* of Novo Horizonte, Brazil participants describe desperate living conditions, but when asked which institutions they trust, a man says, “What makes me trust in one institution is when I knock on its door, it is open to me. Look...this prefecture is so nice that I have the mayor’s private phone number. He is a mayor who does not close the doors to the

community, and it is the same with the secretary of social development.” Another example that warrants particular attention is the praise given by a group of poor women to the superintendent of the Constant Spring Police Station in Cassava Piece, Jamaica. A group of poor women had praise for the police officer: “Anybody can have access to the superintendent in charge of Constant Spring Police Station. If you have a complaint you just walk in and ask to see her and they just send you upstairs to see her. She will call up the officer and deal with him.”

Examples abound elsewhere. A sheikh in El Gawaber, Egypt distributes *zakat* (alms) during the night so that nobody notices who is getting it, and the dignity of the poor is preserved. A community health worker in Chief Kabamba, Zambia, although short of medicines, serves everyone without discrimination. The village head in Duyen Hai, Vietnam, though from a majority group in a minority community, has won the hearts of the villagers and helps everyone. A nurse in Ozerny, Russia never turns anyone away. A principal in Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria raises money from the affluent to keep the children of the poor in school. A priest in Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador, considered the most important person in the community, provides medicine and food, organizes health services, and makes links with other institutions. A poor man in Vila União, Brazil struggled against the odds, became a community worker, was elected community leader, and now works to help street girls who have been victims of violence. A *Samurdhi* (government program for the poor) officer in Thirukadallur, Sri Lanka goes everywhere and nobody has anything bad to say about him. Women throughout Somaliland were the peace mediators between warring clans.

f. Build Institutional Character

Poor people are often badly treated by officials, by service providers, particularly those of the state, and by traders, with behavior that is crushing, cruel, humiliating, taunting, angering and frustrating. Corrupt and bad behavior comes in many guises, even in the extreme forms of violence, imprisonment and extortion. Pervasively poor people report rudeness, arrogance, insensitivity and lack of respect from those in authority. Together these deter poor people from contact with outsiders and in seeking services.

Institutional design efforts must include defining the character, qualities and the behavior desired of all those who are affiliated with the institutions. What poor people want are staff who are accessible, who listen, and who are patient, polite, sensitive and committed. They indicate the huge difference it means to be treated with respect, not to be kept waiting longer than others and not to be looked down on because of old clothes and shabby appearance. At little additional cost, the wellbeing of poor people can be dramatically improved by changes in service providers' attitudes and behavior. An attitude of service, respect and caring even when help is not available is profoundly appreciated.

In addition to appropriate incentives, mind-set shifts can be facilitated by the following:

- ▶ *Share good practice.* Champions like those above can inspire and help others, spreading their practices through learning visits, secondments, and peer-to-peer training. They can be rewarded through the recognition and prestige attributed to good practice.
- ▶ *Train for changes in behavior and attitudes.* Make behavior change the core of curricula in training institutions and programs. Reinforce this especially in the training of service providers, such as police, teachers, doctors, nurses and extension workers who have direct contact with poor people. In training institutions and programs, introduce training modules, exercises and self-critical reflection to encourage sensitive listening and learning, nondominating facilitation, and a spirit of service, with the style of training itself participatory.
- ▶ *Involve staff in poverty immersions and participatory appraisals.* Provide opportunities for open-ended learning from poor people. The study demonstrates the powerful impact participatory appraisals can have on those who facilitate them. The potential here is to make direct experiential learning available to those in international agencies, governments, corporations and civil society. Staying in poor communities for even short times and serving as field facilitators in participatory poverty studies create experiential opportunities to listen and learn face-to-face from poor people.

The Challenge to Change

Listening to voices of poor people is a beginning, but only a beginning. At worst, it may only lead to a change in rhetoric. It sounds good to have elicited the voices of the poor. Quoting their striking statements as we have done in this book may make an impression. But the crux is deeper change. Poor people can be heard, quoted and written about without the harder step of changing policies. And policy can be changed without the even harder step of changing what actually happens on the ground. The voices of poor people cry out for change. Commitment to deep change demands a lot. Three domains for change stand out: professional, institutional and personal.

The *professional* change that is required is a paradigm shift. It concerns professional concepts, values, methods and behaviors in development. It entails modifying dominant professional preconceptions with insights from participatory approaches and methods. It implies starting with the realities of the poor. To do so is not to deny the validity of other approaches and methods.

It is, rather, to introduce a different starting point and point of reference that other approaches and methods can complement. It demands that professionalism include reflection on the implications of decisions and actions for poor men and women.

Institutional change is cultural and behavioral. To the extent that organizations reward domineering behaviors, they are antithetical to the sensitive, responsive and empowering approaches needed to give the needs and interests of poor people priority. These behaviors are dictated by the norms, rules, rewards, incentives and values implicit in organizations. Organizations that affect poor people's lives include donor agencies, governments and their departments, the private sector, NGOs, universities and training institutes.

Personal change is fundamental to the other two. Changes that are professional and institutional and changes in policy and practice all depend on personal commitment and change. The self-evidence of this statement should not detract from its force, for eventually it is individuals who make a difference, including individuals who behave and act differently even when surrounded by rot, corruption and indifference.

The need and opportunity to act and to change are greatest for those who are wealthy and powerful and who never come in direct contact with poor people. For them it can be hard to know the effects of their actions and inactions. It can be easy and tempting not to know. Few politicians, policymakers, senior bureaucrats, staff of international agencies and the influential elite have had the chance to learn from poor people. This book is no substitute for direct experience, but we hope that, however modestly, it will help to bridge this gap. Those who speak through these pages were generous in the time they gave to the study. They shared their experience. Many have suffered traumas of war, violence, hunger, sickness, debt, exploitation, exclusion, harassment, pain and fear. Many wondered whether anything they said would make any difference.

Will *Voices of the Poor* make things better for those poor people who took part or for the hundreds of millions of others like them or their children? The answer is that it depends. It depends on the vision, courage, and will of all touched by this study. It depends on us all.

