

Village Based Approach

CHOICE Humanitarian's key program is the Self-Developing Village Program -- a proven process for ending extreme poverty through:

1. **Organizing:** Building a foundation of trust (6-12 months). A village learns to identify its leaders, inventory its needs and assets, create a common vision, set priorities, establish committees, and define responsibilities.
 2. **Mobilizing:** Developing leadership capacity (years 2 -3). Villagers learn to create an action plan and carry out projects they have selected, leveraging their own resources and networking with their local governments, NGOs, and CHOICE strategic partners (expeditioners, volunteers, corporations, and others). The projects are used as tools to develop leadership skills in a "learn-by-doing" process.
 3. **Institution building:** Becoming self-sufficient (years 4-5) through the development of committees, Village Councils, and village-sponsored sustainable business opportunities, using the learning-by-doing model in partnership with investors and mentors, ultimately becoming integrated into national and international economies.
-

The CHOICE Self-Developing Village Program Strategy – How it Works

Models Proven Over 30 Years

Operational Strategies: Over the past nearly 30 years of field testing under the leadership of Dr. James Mayfield, CHOICE has developed highly effective programs and strategies that incorporate the following eight keys to village self-development:

1. **Leadership Training:** CHOICE invites villagers to learn five basic skills needed to take responsibility for their own development:
 - Assessment – Villagers identify the needs and concerns of their community, identify resources, strengths, weaknesses and learn problem-solving skills
 - Local Institution Building – A Village Development Committee is organized with sub-committees charged with addressing specific needs of the village. Each is linked to supporting local government institutions, NGOs and other potential partners
 - Project Implementation – Villagers learn by doing, participating in and eventually managing implementation of projects they, as a community, have selected

- Partnership – Villagers learn how to identify and invite other NGOs, private business, and key stakeholders in their area to work with them
 - Commitment – Communities start by investing everything they can first in their own path forward. Where an NGO is committed to successful implementation of a project and the community is not, it inappropriately shifts responsibility of success to the NGO and it becomes unsustainable and nothing more than a hand-out.
2. **Networking:** CHOICE teaches the skills and tools for networking and linking villagers to outside support in the public, private and social sectors – government officials, business people, informal leaders and key stakeholders – who can become critical factors in the villagers’ development process.
 3. **Resource Mobilization:** By first identifying skills, strengths and resources and then learning how to mobilize and leverage them, CHOICE teaches communities the power they have within themselves to improve their lives. At the same time it positions them to take ownership for their own futures. Potential partners are inspired to help when they see the village commitment to change.
 4. **Holistic Approach:** CHOICE acknowledges the importance of integrating all dimensions of rural development, including education, health, environmental, economic and how needs can be addressed through a culturally relevant development process.
 5. **Long-Term Strategy:** CHOICE focuses on local institution building, through which both formal and informal systems of local governance are strengthened and integrated into the broader public and private sectors of their respective countries over a 3-5 year period. The foundation upon which this long-term strategy for poverty reduction must be built is a system of community integration with the local government ministries of education, health, agriculture and other relevant agencies. In addition, an economic development initiative utilizing micro, small, and medium enterprises linked to district, national and international markets can mobilize their latent economic strength.
 6. **Self-Perpetuating Viral Effect:** Once a group of villages has gone through the CHOICE process and begins to develop on their own, neighboring villages take note. Village leaders from other areas contact CHOICE villages for help. CHOICE-trained villagers share their knowledge and pass the Self Developing Village Program to eager neighbors.

7. **Baseline Data Collected:** Measurement and evaluation are integral to the CHOICE model. At the start of a community's participation with CHOICE, our in-country staff teach villagers how to collect and analyze data and, in turn, to measure their progress. Our true measure of success is when a community, and subsequently a district successfully implements sustainable projects and programs without relying on CHOICE resources or leadership.

 8. **Participation:** CHOICE encourages investors (donors) not just to fund our work, but also to participate. Regularly scheduled expeditions offer investors an opportunity to develop greater awareness and understanding of the realities of world poverty and to build relationships with people and cultures they would otherwise never engage. By working directly with villagers, our investors experience first-hand the impact of village-driven self-development.
-

The CHOICE Self-developing village model - Why it works.

Lasting change comes from within

Lasting change comes not from outside or when implemented by others, but when it comes from within – within a person, within a community, within a culture. For this reason, CHOICE focuses its development process on the people involved, through the implementation of the project. The village community is the nucleus of all ideas and activity.

Participation with CHOICE engages villagers in a learn-by-doing process that leads to the internalization of development know-how. The most brilliant of ideas is doomed to failure unless a community chooses to work for its collective good and individuals choose to take full responsibility in executing that idea. Additionally, local knowledge, local materials, local technologies, and local capacities play a vital role in assuring that any improvements generated will continue to serve a population indefinitely, without dependence on outside assistance.

As CHOICE leadership and resources taper-off, local leadership and resource mobilization swells. It becomes a seamless 'exit strategy' for CHOICE as local talent fully steps in to their role as leaders into their own future.

Culturally Appropriate Planning

Sustainable development must embrace local culture, existing political structures, social structures, and tradition. Allowing the villagers to lead the visioning, consensus building, and execution of projects and programs ensures that the entire process will be responsive to their customs, norms, languages, and assumptions. This learning-by-doing approach builds leadership skills and at the same time protects against the cultural pitfalls that turn great intentions and great projects into failures.

CHOICE mentors community members in identifying their own unique strengths, cultural characteristics and belief systems which leads to relevant objectives and goals in their development plan.

Leadership Development

Poverty often has its roots in a long history of disempowerment, leading the impoverished to believe that they must depend on the wealthy in order to improve their lives. When villagers take ownership of their own development, they come to realize that the power to decide what they need and how they would like to create change lies within them. With power comes responsibility for leaders to truly represent the voice of their community, build consensus, assign actions, and follow up. This process develops their leadership skills and builds the confidence they need to lead their communities out of poverty.

When projects and programs are owned and maintained by the community, rather than by the sponsoring agency, they have a much greater chance of being sustainable.

Women as Equal Partners in Leadership

Women in impoverished communities bear almost the entire responsibility of providing the basic needs for their families, yet are largely left without the resources, freedom, and decision-making power required to fulfill these needs. CHOICE is committed to programs that empower women to take an active and equal role in community-level decision-making and leadership, and to organize themselves around projects and programs that strengthen their ability to meet family needs.

Local Management for a Culturally-Appropriate Partnership

CHOICE hires and trains locals to be the development team. Local staffers know the linguistic and cultural heritage, the traditions and religions of the communities in which they work. This fundamental aspect of the CHOICE program makes it possible for CHOICE staff to gain and solidify the trust necessary to effectively and efficiently interact with the communities in which we work.

The Collaborative Team

CHOICE cultivates collaborative teams of village leaders, development experts, generous donors, and non-government organizations to work closely with national and local government officials. This group acts as the village support team. In most cases for the first time, village leaders are the principle voice on the team in the process of problem-solving for their community.

CHOICE teams begin with an In-Country Director (ICD), who oversees all operations and the hiring and training of Rural Development Facilitators (RDF) to work with the villages, guiding each community through the steps of the CHOICE model. This team of in-country staff, all local to the area, work side-by-side with the native population to prepare them to take charge of the development process.

CHOICE ICDs and RDFs identify natural leaders within each community, individuals who are well respected and who demonstrate both an affinity for development and an interest in the work. These individuals are integral to the CHOICE team, as experts-in-training. These leaders may be existing political representatives of the community or at minimum people who can work hand in hand with this existing government structures. With village approval, the new leaders become a voice for their community. Trained in community mobilization and sustainable development, they transition into the roles previously filled by CHOICE staff when the time comes (usually 3-5 years) for their community to be launched into Village Self-Development.

Self-Developing Village Learning Cycle

The CHOICE Model of the Self-Developing Village is a five-step, cyclical process that rural communities learn to use as an impetus for change and a method for achieving on-going, community-wide progress. Beginning with stages of self-assessment and organization, the model walks villagers through action planning and project execution to structured evaluation and the celebration of a job well done. Ultimately, the model leads villages within a given area to collaborate as a district, linking their efforts in common governance and economic development, more quickly and effectively reducing poverty and increasing quality of life.

“CHOICE exists to **promote development**, not relief.”

James Mayfield, Co-Founder, CHOICE Humanitarian

Step One: Qualifying the Village

Identify Leadership

- Natural Leaders
- Political Leaders

Assess Attitude

- Willingness
- Commitment
- Unified Voice

Review Assets

- Human Capital
- Economic Power
- Infrastructure
- Network

Step Two: Building the Team

- Guided Village Self-Evaluation
- Leadership Training
- Village Organization
- Long-Term Strategy
- Partnership

Action Plan

- Focus on the Priority
- Prepare Project Proposal
- Build in Sustainability
- Assign Responsibilities
- Mobilize Local Resources
- Network Outside Resources

Execution

- Launch Project
 - Mentor Project Managers
 - Oversee Committee Work
1. Manage Work Teams
 2. Coordinate Project Materials Delivery
 3. Plan for Sustainability
 - a. Technical Training
 - b. Maintenance
 - c. Financial Viability

Celebration and Learning

- Celebrate Completion
- Evaluate Project Outcomes

- Evaluate Overall Standard of Living Increase
- Assess Sustainability
- Evaluate Human Capacity Increases
- Prepare for Next Priority