Just and lasting change: When communities own their futures

By Daniel Taylor- Ide and Carl E. Taylor


Reviewed by Chesley W. Ray
SIL International

Just and lasting change: When communities own their futures is a challenging, thought-provoking book. It is profitable, even essential, reading for anyone involved in sustainable cross-cultural work. The authors write from a lifetime of experience. The ideas shared in the book start with an attitude. The attitude must lead to action that is based on the felt needs of the people being served, with support from an understanding government and enlightened advice from outside experts.

The twenty-two-chapter book is organized into five sections:

1. The Claim: A Just and Lasting Future is Achievable
2. Historical Demonstrations
3. Evidence from the Community Level
4. Large-Scale Applications
5. SEED-Scale Handbooks

Major changes in societies, such as significant improvements in child survival, are possible. But what interventions are necessary to facilitate those changes? This book addresses these needs, empowering people to change attitudes and habits at the grass roots or foundational level.

The Prologue provides the historical setting, going back to 1914, when the parents and grandparents of the authors started their work in the foothills of the Himalayas as medical missionaries.

The Introduction paints a brief picture of the inequality among the inhabitants of our planet. The SEED-Scale is also introduced. This is an acronym for Self-Evaluation for Effective Decisionmaking and Systems for Communities to Adapt Learning and Expand. SEED-Scale is regularly referred to throughout the book. Scale is in three steps: Scale One, Scale Squared, and Scale Cubed. Scale One defines the axis of change at community level. Scale Squared outlines the axis that brings in knowledge and change—often outside experts. Scale Cubed is the enabling environment of policies and financing. This is the role of government.
Part I: The Claim: A Just and Lasting Future is Achievable

In chapter one, “Getting Started: Positive Change Is Possible” the authors list the three principles that are key to planned, intentional community change:

1. Three-way partnerships between the people of the community, outside experts, and government officials
2. Action based on locally specific data, and
3. Changes in community behavior

A seven-step procedure is proposed for communities to monitor their progress and take corrective action. These come under three headings: Building Capacity, Choosing a vision, and Taking Action. (For details, see p. 21.)


In chapter two the authors provide a “Synopsis of SEED-SCALE.” A significant point in this chapter is that “Development grows out of hope” (p. 22). Community energy seldom mobilizes by itself; thus the three-way partnership of community, outside expert, and supportive government is essential. Solutions not based on locally specific data usually do not adequately address local felt needs. Changes in community behavior must be an integral part of real progress.

SCALE is in three levels. In SCALE One the community selects, learns from, and promotes successful projects. In SCALE Squared the demonstration community becomes a learning center for others beyond that community. In SCALE Cubed the project extends throughout regions and societies. At SCALE One a community collaborates and agrees on a direction they want to go. There must be a sense of equity so that all benefit. Some kind of controls is necessary to ensure equity. Sustainability must be possible and it must retain a human face. “The antithesis of development is dependency” (p. 42); thus interdependence, not dependency, is essential. Actions must be holistic, relating to the entire community, not sectoral. Finally, actions must be iterative, involving sequential learning and continual adjustment.

In chapter three, “Making a Large and Lasting Impact” the authors discuss four scaling up philosophies that are widely used today. The first is “The Blueprint Approach” which is usually a top-down approach and is commonly used in mass development programs such as the Peace Corps distributing superchickens to thousands of villages in developing countries. This approach is usually expert driven. The second approach is “The Explosion Approach” which is used to address large-scale, temporary, specific needs such as providing food due to some catastrophe. The third or “Additive Approach” is most often used by proponents of a bottom-up approach. Control, by a strong leader or group, is a danger here. The fourth is “The Biological Approach.” Three characteristics define the biological approach: the potential for exponential expansion, healthy and integrated relationships, and tensegrity or homeostatic relationships. This possibly confusing concept “works by balancing systems in flexible homeostasis rather than by building
in a mechanical way that attaches its components rigidly” (p. 58). There is a place for all four approaches. The authors, however, have found that the biological approach has most often worked for just and lasting change.

Chapter four, “Our Maturing Understanding of Community Change” is a short chapter in which the authors reiterate Dr. Paulo Freire’s challenge that for community-driven development to happen, the development must “Scratch where the people itch…”

Chapter five, “Assuring Accountability through Better Paperwork” is a call for documenting on paper what is planned, what is being done and what has been done. The annual work plan is the foundation document for this. It brings all partners together. Advantages of the SEED-SCALE are that it starts simply and gives the community a voice.

Chapter six is entitled “A Crisis Can Become an Opportunity.” The primary authors, along with Henry G. Taylor, look at three examples of actual emergencies: a flood in West Virginia, a civil war in Bangladesh, and the situation in the Middle East during and after the Gulf War. Such situations, whether local, national, or international need input from the local community, outside experts, and a supportive government structure. When this is in place, a crisis can become an opportunity to learn how to handle other crises.

Part II: Historical Demonstrations

In chapter seven, “Ding Xian: The First Example of Community-Based Development” the authors relate the experiences of a man in China named Jimmy Yen (Yen Yangchu). Mr. Yen and his colleagues evolved eight principles that do much to ensure a healthy, equitable community:

1. Good health care depends chiefly on social organization.
2. A vertical health system cannot stand by itself but must be integrated with other social activities.
3. Socioeconomic progress depends on demonstration under local conditions of new methods that are scientific, efficient, economical, and practical.
4. Community use of modern knowledge lags when scientific investigation is detached from society.
5. Effective community demonstration projects promote self-help and encourage a two-way flow of professional and administrative services at a financial and technical level appropriate to the local area, with mechanisms for extending the findings.
6. Planning must build from local units of organization rather than imposing central administrative practices on the periphery.
7. Professional training should be in keeping with the needs and resources of the area.
8. Successful social development requires a supportive political and economic framework and equitable distribution.

Following and implementing these principles did much to alleviate human suffering in China under Mao, in Taiwan, and in the Philippines.
Chapter eight is entitled “Kerala: Development without Wealth.” Kerala, a state in India, is an example of a place where the rates of mortality, fertility, and educational levels are equivalent to much wealthier states. Now, Kerala is advancing economically as well. It stands as an example of what can be done when development is just and sustainable. The authors explain phase one where success rose to attention; phase two, the adapting and adopting phase, and phase three, going to scale. The chapter concludes with lessons that can be learned from Kerala.

In chapter nine, “The Adirondacks: An Evolving Balance between People and Nature” the authors discuss how the Adirondacks development uses a conservation approach that differs markedly from other national parks in the U.S. It shows how a cooperative agreement, hammered out between a government agency and private landowners has evolved an approach to park management and operation that is effective and economical. Approximately half of the land is owned by the state, the other half is privately owned. Now all six criteria of genuine development—equity, sustainability, interdependence, holism, collaboration, and iteration—are operating. The chapter finishes with lessons from the Adirondacks.

Chapter ten, “Narangwal: The Role of Conceptual and Cultural Breakthroughs” is an exciting chapter. It is set in India. Several break-throughs in health issues are documented. Locally implemented treatments for such common illnesses as pneumonia, diarrhea, marasmus (protein-energy malnutrition), and neonatal tetanus resulted in sharp declines in infant and childhood mortality. Integration of maternal and child health with family planning resulted in further health improvements and economic savings. Much can be learned from the examples in this chapter.

Part III: Evidence from the Community Level

Chapter eleven, “Curitiba, Brazil: A Better Pattern for Cities” is an example of how one city addressed the challenge of just and sustainable living in cities. It is an example of how innovative planning created people-focused development. One measure of the success of the city is that ninety-nine percent of the city's inhabitants declared that they were happy with their town. People-sensitive city leadership, concern for ecologically sound city development that includes a good public transportation system, an expanding amount of park land, concern for the needs of children, and innovative city management have led to a city that is the envy of many.

Chapter twelve, “Jamkhed, India: The Evolution of a World Training Center” was written by Mabelle and Raj Arole. When they were young doctors, the Aroles committed themselves to improving the health of the poorest of the poor where they worked in India. But it was only as they got outside the hospital and began to look at the causative factors of pain and suffering that real progress was made. Clean water was a keenly felt need in the community. Communication and partnerships had to be fostered between groups. In most cases, health in general was not a felt need. It was only when more pressing needs, such as clean water, were addressed that people began to give attention to general health concerns. People began to survey their own needs. This provided accurate local data. Based on this data, people began to ask questions, learn the real reasons for their health problems, and address the causes of their illnesses. This led to significant improvements in health, which was the original goal the doctors had. But it didn’t end with health. The program expanded, both geographically and in scope. Such things as reforestation
were included. Through better health practices, infant mortality dropped from one hundred seventy-five to eighteen per one thousand births, fertility decreased, and population is stabilizing.

This is an exciting chapter, showing how empowered, motivated people can make a very significant difference in their own lives and replace hopelessness with hope.

Chapter thirteen, “Gadchiroli, India: Addiction as a Barrier to Development” was written by Abhay and Rani Bang. Societal addictions can be a major hindrance to development. The addiction in this community was alcohol, mainly by the men. Both men and women recognized the problem but didn’t seem to be able to take the needed corrective actions. The project started with a misstep; trying to implement what people other than the community felt was the major problem in the community. This didn’t work. The community followed a three-step approach to breaking out of the addiction:

1. Building capacity
2. Choosing a direction
3. Taking action

The Gadchiroli example shows what can be accomplished by a coalition of motivated local communities, outside experts, and a supportive government.

Chapter fourteen, “Kakamega, Kenya: A Promising Start Derailed” was written by Miriam K. Were. The Kakamega project attracted worldwide attention because of its early success. Then it faltered—because a true three-way partnership was never created. The project’s success was also its downfall. The community and experts had worked well together. The project started with the main concern being health. The people collected data and began building their own capacity. Partnerships began to evolve. This led to road improvement, which the people undertook themselves, and constructing bridges, which government agencies built. The role of women was expanded. Family planning grew from this. The people were experiencing a sense of “we can do it.” This was in sharp contrast to former feelings of being trapped and powerless.

Due to the success of the program, the Ministry of Health, using international donor money, took over. Soon, the community and the experts were disempowered and the project floundered. “The focus shifted from communities working for what they wanted to individuals working—and being paid—for what donors wanted” (p. 175). The focus changed from process to results. A couple of years after the government assumed control, thus disempowering the communities, the project was abandoned.

“The White Mountain Apache, United States: Reclaiming Self-Determination” is the title of chapter fifteen. Many years of government ‘help’ had left the people disempowered and dependent. In the mid 1970s, following enabling federal legislation (Indian Self-Determination and Education Act [P.L. 638]) “an energetic tribal council took a number of forceful actions to regain some control in shaping their own lives” (p. 180). A growing cooperation by tribal members and outside experts was making an impact. The focus of power was moving to the community. An intended fact-finding mission on health grew to include a much more holistic approach to “our Cibecue community walking forward together” (p. 182) which included much
more than just what kind of clinic was needed. A significant addition was environmental concern that birthed a desire in some of the young people to study for and take jobs in environmentally related fields. Surveys showed several serious health concerns. Ironically, they were rarely the concerns that their health services were designed to address. The most serious health needs stemmed from social factors. This underlines the need for local information.

This project is still under development. But a start to empowering the community has been made.

**Part IV: Large-Scale Applications**

Chapter sixteen, “Urban Agriculture: A Powerful Engine for Sustainable Cities” was written by Jac Smit. In many of the world’s major cities, such as Calcutta, India, the people are producing a substantial percentage of their own food, often using wastewater and solid waste. Many benefits, such as civic stability and improved air quality are realized. In some areas, such as Bulgaria, urban agriculture is contributing significantly to poverty alleviation, food security, and good health. There are benefits beyond the food produced. There are savings on waste disposal; it is being recycled and used in food production. Economically disadvantaged people, such as women, children, and the elderly, contribute to food production and their own economic wellbeing. Health, civility, and stability increase. In order for urban agriculture to reach its potential it needs experts with ideas, favorable city governments, and citizens who enthusiastically embrace the vision.

Chapter seventeen, “Peru: Communities and Government Learning to Work Together” was written by Patricia Paredes and Carl E. Taylor. The people in the mountains outside Lima showed that they could take care of themselves by defeating the Shining Path guerillas. They then wanted more say in the provision of a health system that met their needs better than what they previously had. There was some resistance by the entrenched, government-run system to CLAS, the new community driven health system. Where there was active participation by the community, with good community-based data, and support from the government, the CLAS centers flourished. Women, especially from the community, had significant leadership roles.

“The apparent success of CLAS is still fragile, and its relations with government services remain uncertain.” However, “communities are eager to organize and solve their own problems” (p. 206). One weakness of the program was that it was not able to integrate other areas such as family planning, education, environmental concerns, and food security. Government officials were unwilling to do this. In spite of the hindrances, this community-driven program expanded to national level in less than ten years.

Chapter eighteen is entitled “Tibet, China: Integrating Conservation with Development.” ‘Development’ means different things to different people. For many years, development in Tibet was defined in spiritual terms. China’s take over of Tibet in 1959 changed that. After a couple of decades of suffering, a new order began to emerge which addressed economic, conservation, and social needs simultaneously. A fragile environment is a limiting factor; all else must be built around that. An effective three-way partnership was developed among communities, leaders, and experts. The local people collected local data then determined, with help from outside expertise and support from government officials, how to design a way of living that provided a living and
preserved the environment. Preservation happened while the people continued to live on the land. This exciting chapter shows that it is possible, using the SEED-SCALE approach, for significant economic, social, and environmental changes to occur without total disruption of the society.

Chapter nineteen, “China’s Model Counties: Going to Scale with Health Care” was written by Carl E. Taylor, Robert Parker, and Zeng DongLu. This chapter relates the rapid growth of a maternal and child health initiative through the cooperation of the communities, UNICEF, and China’s Ministry of Public Health. A six-stage explanation is provided (see pages 228-229) of the scaling up process in which a ten-county pilot project expanded to four hundred counties in thirteen years. Key components are provided in going to SCALE. This includes Action learning (training that is experience based and participatory), priority interventions (determining by survey what the most pressing felt health needs are, along with cost-effective solutions), and exponential extension (rapid expansion of the processes to other counties).

This chapter relates what can happen when a large, poor, and densely populated country combines top-down, bottom-up, and outside-in methods to accomplish widespread, needed changes in areas such as just and equitable health care.

**Part V: SEED-SCALE Handbooks**

Chapter twenty is entitled “SEED-SCALE Principles and Criteria.” Broad field-testing indicates that three activities are principles for successful social action:

1. Forming a three-way partnership of community members, officials, and experts,
2. Basing action on locally specific data, and
3. Using a community work plan to change collective behavior.

“Together, these three create the foundation on which community action can grow” (p. 239). The principles operate synergistically; all must be present for long-term success.

Both internal and external partnerships are essential. Communities are the foundation of sustainable action. Officials are needed since they are the decisionmakers who oversee budgets, policy, laws, administrative regulations and in some cases, professional credentials. Experts are the third group. Donors are being included here. A major warning here is that donors should not be permanent partners; that is dependency, not development.

Communities, experts, and officials do not want to take undue risks. One of the surest ways to increase the likelihood of success is to base action on locally specific, constantly updated data, not the desires or opinions of those who provide the money. “Data driven action scratches where the community itches” (p. 245).

Communities need help in effecting needed changes; this is where outside experts fit. Behaviors of all partners may need to progressively change in order to meet community needs. Chapter two lists six criteria that are recommended for monitoring progress.
This chapter is probably the best one to read to get an informed look at what SEED-SCALE is.

Betsy Taylor, along with the main two authors, wrote chapter twenty-one, “Community-Based Action through SEED.” Hard data, rather than opinions, is essential for making informed decisions. Then communities, experts, and officials need to come together around each locality’s situation. This informed talk can lead to objective decisionmaking and doable action.

- **Organize the assessment**
  - Define the community (any group with something in common and the potential for cooperative action)
  - Simplify the options (focus on high-priority interests on which there is wide agreement)
  - Select key indicators (Experts can help select some key indicators to reflect the status of each area. Key indicators might include such things as community health, the flying indicators of the ecosystem status, land use, domestic water quality, economic indicators, soil quality, and forest status.)

- **Conduct the assessment**
  - Select and train the assessment team (professional guidance with local participation provides the most reliable data)
  - Gather and analyze the data (be sure to complete the process, even if the data is poor)
  - Set communitywide priorities (this needs to involve as many community people as possible)

- **Create a work plan**
  - Causal analysis (agreeing on priorities makes it much easier to move forward with analysis)
  - Functional analysis (once people have decided what to do, they must decide on how and who will do it)
  - Role reallocation (people need to adapt their behavior to suit new circumstances)

Whatever the context, rich or poor, following the SEED principles enables people to meet their own felt needs or “to scratch where they itch in ways they can afford” (p. 281).

In chapter twenty-two, “How to go to SCALE,” the authors state that the most vexing challenge they have faced in changing communities is how to take small successes to scale. The following steps are proposed:

- **SCALE One**: Successful change as learning experiences—communities must believe that their future can be better than their past; and that they have brought about this improvement themselves.
- **SCALE Squared**: Self-help center for action learning and experimentation—it must be understood that adaptation is usually necessary in order for the innovation to work in a different community. Continual surveillance from year to year is essential.
- **SCALE Cubed**: Systems for collaboration, adaptive learning, and extension—this dimension supports exponential transformation and is most effectively initiated by officials. Several systems need to be put in place:
- System for sustainable collaboration (This most important but most difficult activity is promoting attitudinal and behavior change in officials and experts.)
- System for adaptive learning (This involved all-inclusive meetings to decide upon actions and needed training. It is essential to keep discussions focused on facts and prevent factionalism.)
- System for extension (The tasks of experts and officials becomes simpler—though they usually have a hard time letting go of the desire for control.)

Several points are provided for how communities can promote SEED-SCALE. (See p. 269)

In the final section, “Conclusion: Patterns for Action,” the authors express several concerns. One is the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Another is the legacy we leave our children as we persist in disrupting the earth’s systems. These are not minor concerns.

The book closes thus: “As humans, if we are humble, we can take real, next steps and sequence them into a continuing journey. In taking these steps we must remember that development is not a product, but a process; it is not a solution, but a way by which each community can create an evolving and unique pattern to achieve a more just and lasting future” (p. 321).

Note: Many of the examples in this book highlight health concerns. However, the principles are equally applicable to a number of other fields, including but not limited to literacy and community development. I recommend it as a “must read” for those involved in cross-cultural ministries. We need to practice Jimmy Yen’s advice (p. 93):

*Go to the People.*
*Live with the People,*
*Learn from the People.*
*Plan with the People,*
*Work with the People.*
*Start with what they know,*
*Build on what they have.*
*Teach by showing, learn by doing.*
*Not a showcase, but a pattern.*
*Not piecemeal, but integrated.*
*Not odds and ends, but a system.*
*Not to conform, but to transform.*
*Not relief, but release.*