

S H A R E

 CEDAR FUND 施達基金會 From Church · Through Church	Suite 504, Rightful Centre, 12 Tak Hing Street, Kowloon, Hong Kong		January - February 2017
	G.P.O. Box 3212 Hong Kong	TEL (852) 2381 9627	FAX (852) 2392 2777
	URL www.cedarfund.org	EMAIL jsharing@cedarfund.org	FB CEDAR Fund



FOCUS ~ URBAN POVERTY

Spread the Love to City Edges

Interviewing and editing: Canace Chiu & Tsun Wan Yan

The rapid economic growth of India did not significantly reduce its population living in poverty. Although halved from the 90's, the number of poor people living in India still reaches 600 million, with 300 to 400 million of them living under extreme poverty. The country is not spared from the plethora of social problems experienced by other developing countries, such as a large income gap and rural-urban migration. CEDAR hopes to share with you the stories that took place in the lesser known areas of India, and we wish you could remember the suffering people and God's servants in your prayers in this New Year season.

Love among the needed

The Society for Promotion of Tribal Welfare and Development (SPTWD) is CEDAR's partner in Delhi, India, who stood fast to demonstrate God's love to the least and to change people's lives throughout the years by slowly improving their living conditions in situations where change was seemingly impossible.

The story of SPTWD started with its founder, Sem Haokip. In

the 90's, a village named Manipur in eastern India was involved in a racial conflict that took 300 lives, including that of Sem's sister. Consumed by vengeance, Sem could not eat and sleep well. At the same time, he realized that violence against violence could not solve the problem at its roots, while the understanding and acceptance of the other groups' culture could. With that thought, he went back to the village where his enemies resided and started to build schools, and facilitated cross-cultural decisions making. His exhibition of love against hatred was greeted with success seen in the raise of cross-cultural acceptance and trust. Sem eventually founded SPTWD in 2003 that focused to serve the underprivileged in the suburbs.

Being the capital of India, New Delhi is not exempt from environmental and population crisis despite having significant advantages in reaping the fruits of development first hand, such as the Aadhaar card that greatly simplifies the social security registration process. It has its own problems such as rural-urban migration causing a large migrant worker population, as well as accelerating the city's unemployment rate, pollution, human trafficking, crime rate, and urban poverty.



Sem, the faithful servant of the slums.

Urban poverty is a hard and multi-faceted puzzle, but Sem proclaimed that "God's redemptive transformation" is crucial to the people and communities they work with and work for. He hoped that the new generation and the women in the suburbs would restore their dignity in God through the works of

SPTWD, whose focus in recent years has been to stimulate employment and to implement sustainable income in the target group by providing them the business loan support and grounds for social enterprises.

Building Bridges of Love for the Next Generation

SPTWD provides vocational trainings for young people and connects them with employers. Sem introduced us to a group of youngsters who came from northeastern India to Delhi, "Many of the NE youths who come to Delhi are from poor families. They are less educated, with no skill and work experience, hence making them uncompetitive in the job market... They were furthermore marginalized because of their migrant status; oppressions and insults are common in their communities. They are also isolated from local churches. Many youth got into drugs due to depression and humiliation and exploitation suffered from their employers." He and SPTWD were hence committed to be the bridge between these youngsters and churches that facilitates social support networks among them.

Young people living in poverty would often make ends meet by stealing on the busy streets of Delhi. "This is crucial to meet the aspirations of the urban youth living in slum colonies to prevent them from falling into crimes and other exploitations." Said Sem, who partners with the local churches to provide vocational trainings for them, "They just couldn't see how things would work. All they needed was just an opportunity, and that is exactly what we're going to do, to be a lighthouse in the dark that gives them the spark of hope they deserve."

Changing the lives of women

We were also being introduced to SPTWD's work among women. They had two social enterprise projects, one of which was a textile school, and the other one a sanitary napkin factory that showed great financial promise that provided the participating women 60% more of the projected income in the last quarter of 2016. Sem is undoubtedly excited, but he further longs for the changes in the women's lives.



The sanitary napkin factory improved the income and sustainability of women; at the same time, it promoted the use of clean sanitary napkins that replaces other unhygienic means of cleaning during women's period.

He told us the story of Sarita, a typical Indian woman who was married at an early age. Unfortunately, her husband became an alcoholic with serious illnesses. She was forced to find a job to survive as requested by his mother and father-in-law. Sarita became a sewing teacher in our partners' project in 2007, and came to know Christ and was baptized after 2 years by joining the daily morning prayer sessions with other staff.

Unfortunately, life had not been kind to her as she was having a troubled marriage, and was eventually passed away from Leukemia in 2013. However, her kind smiles and positive energies had set a great example for the girls in the sewing class that encouraged them till this day.

Sem told us that Sarita was a perfect example of how the Lord would search for the sons and daughters chosen by Him, and when His followers are steadfast in their faith and servanthood, the people around them will see His glory in them, just like how He prepared a great teacher Sarita for the students of the project, who not only taught them skills, but also inspired them spiritually.

Abiding to Faith

Christians amount to 3% of India's total population. Being a minority religion, Christianity is being as oppressed and segregated as experienced by the underprivileged. The SPTWD's service in India is plagued by the lack of human and physical resources, office space, and religious freedom, which has only been more and more restrictive lately. Despite these challenges, Sem is still diligent in upholding Christian values in everything he does, just as taught in the Colossians— "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord." This is also the motivation for SPTWD that propels them in sharing Jesus' love to more people in the suburban in the face of the challenges.

We are thankful for the great testimony made by Sem and his team, who bring love into the city edges as God's faithful servants. We also hope that we could devote ourselves to the Lord in this New Year and support the bruised reed and smoldering wick near and far, that we would promote justice with our faith and long for Christ's sovereignty on earth with hope.

BACK TO THE BIBLE



The Poor You Will Always Have with You, But...

A common response to Jesus' words in Matthew 26:11 that we often hear is that, "Why should we prioritize helping the poor over evangelizing?" CEDAR's ex-Executive Officer and current Board Member, Dr. Chan Nim Chung, tried to analyze Jesus' stand on the question in a comprehensive yet straightforward manner, while sharing with us some possible applications of the verse. Please visit our website at <http://bit.ly/cedar-share222-biblestudy> for the full article, or get a glimpse of it here in the next few paragraphs.



Dr. Chan pointed out that the Hebrew and Greek words that were translated into "poor" or "poverty" in our Bible today, meant a lot more than simply conveying the state of lacking. They usually came with the cause of poverty, the majority of those being from the sin of man and society. We could see the pattern of exploitation and oppression to the poor in cities in Genesis 4 (Cain building a city after killing Abel and forsaken by God), Genesis 11 (Tower of Babel), and Isaiah 1 (Jerusalem becoming a city of sin); human has been repeating the cycle of collective disobedience to God that sustained the cities' sins.

The Bible has provided a solution to this specific problem through a restorative economy, the most representative verses of which could be found in Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15 about the year of Sabbath and the Year for canceling debts. However, we could not trace how many years of canceling debts had Israel carried out, and today, the poor is still among every one of us in every city, struggling with the ever-increasing income gap and ongoing inhumane oppressions.

In the story where Mary anointed Jesus with a jar of pure nard perfume, Jesus was referring to Deuteronomy 15:11 when He said, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." (Matthew 26:11) He used the contrast of "Always" versus "Not always" to break the news to the disciples who had yet to conceive that His death was nigh; he reiterated that one must love the poor when he referred to Deuteronomy 15, and at the same time revealing the true motives of the questioning Judah and other disciples. How will you conceive this passage? If the poor we will always have with us, then, "If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need." (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)

JOIN HANDS JOIN HEARTS



Rekindling the Hope of Poor Suburb Children

Children are the hope of our society, and most parents would stop at nothing to provide the best for their growth. However, life is different for the children born in the slums who struggle to obtain necessities daily, consequently giving them more obstacles to a bright future. Our partner in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa Guenet Church (AAGC), has been tasked to giving the slum children and their families a better environment for over 20 years.

AAGC provides basic living, education, and health support to the children admitted to their programme, and it holds regular parent self-help groups where they would learn how to manage their finance and do business, to give them a more stable income. It keeps contact with the children who graduated from the programme and continues to walk with them through each of their important life stages.

Abraham Tadasse, the head of the graduate relations of AAGC, is a dear friend of multiple graduates of the programme. He and other staff are often invited to the graduates' weddings, and are even looked up to as their parents to whom they could share the joy and sadness in life.

Abraham was grateful that the children of poverty in the past could grow into men and women that could support their families; He was especially touched to see the changes in child after child, and family after family. "There was a time when I was waiting for taxi, and I came across a programme graduate. She mentioned that I taught her to work hard in improving her own financial conditions, and it became her motivation till that day, where she was in pursuit of a second degree." She insisted to pay for Abraham's trip when they parted ways. It is through these encounters that our Lord has continued to bless the staff and the beneficiaries of AAGC.

Estifanos Menchegetot is another graduate of the programme who expressed tremendous appreciation to Mesker, one of the social workers at AAGC. He was a troublesome and hyperactive kid who was put under the patient care of Mesker, who regularly visit his home in the slums. Estifanos slowly improved over the years, and he has just recently graduated from the Bahir Dar University, majoring in fashion design, and was given the job of an assistant lecturer. He kept a close relationship with Mesker and wished to give back to AAGC to help more children who had similar experience as his.

There is still a disheartening amount of children struggling to flourish in the suburbs, who could see little hope in their future. However, it is through the persistent care of the likes of AAGC that we could see tangible changes in the slum children that really gave them hope.

TAKING ACTION



Living with the Poor—An Interview with Sir Mok

Interviewing & Editing: Tsun Wan Yan

The acts of distributing necessities and visiting elder homes are still the dominant means of social involvement for some of the churches and Christian groups in Hong Kong. Mr. Mok Hing Luen (Sir Mok), a veteran in the field of Hong Kong's social involvement and social work education, thinks that there are much more we could do to our society.

“The church is complacent in giving the resources it has received from God to the people it sees that has a need,” said Sir Mok, who argues that such a downstream mindset of social involvement and poverty solving adopted by churches is self-limiting. But first we must cease boasting our roles among the poor, “No one could serve the poor for a few times and hope to eradicate poverty.” Said Sir Mok.

Christ commanded us to love our neighbours and care for their needs while journeying beside them. “We always talk about walking alongside the poor, but could we really do that? It demands us to go into their environment, to understand their story, to comfort them, and to care for their needs,” said Sir Mok, which brings up the fact that to walk alongside the poor is much harder than just giving them something, as that is easy to do for those of us who have relatively more resources. To accompany the poor is more like discipleship to Sir Mok, which takes continuous effort and visits that builds a trusting friendship between the giver and the recipient.

Advocacy is another front to which we should consider joining. “Systemic problems are a major cause of poverty in society. The lack of political sensitivity among Christians has put us in a disadvantage in the advocacy for the poor,” said Sir Mok, who suggests us to better understand the cause and need of the poor before planning our solutions. Such practice would reap much more benefits in the forms of true life developments in them, and yield less discouragement for us due to the lack of information.

Similarly, advocacy is not a downstream motion. Sir Mok said, “We could help the poor by organizing and empowering them in their advocacy instead of doing it for them. That way they should advocate in their own voice and exercise their potential

to the fullest.” He thinks that the most efficient help for the poor is to empower them to recognize their own ability to take charge and determine their fate, where they would stand firm for themselves in front of the authority and make rightful requests during the policy making process.

The church and Christians, while agreeing to care for and walk alongside the poor, seldom involve in policy advocacy and organizing. To Sir Mok, the reason goes back to the conservative stance that many churches take when it comes to politics and social problems, which might be resulted from a flawed understanding of the separation of church and state, that the church's sole responsibility is to bring people to Christ. However, the Gospel is so much more than The Four Spiritual Laws, which does not mention the commands of our Lord to love and care for one another; just as how Jesus, the perfect manifestation of the Gospel, entered the crowd and touched, comforted, and healed the poor, we should fuel our actions towards our neighbours with the same kind of love.

OPERATING STATEMENT

			Jul – Nov 17	
Income	Donations	HK\$	3,811,639	
	Grants		578,986	
	Appeal for Relief		343,710	
	Other Income		3,173	
			HK\$ 4,737,508	
Expenditure	Projects	Asia	2,975,209	
		China	1,340,338	
		Africa	945,193	
	Disaster Relief & Rehabilitation Projects			661,692
	Education & Promotion			584,964
	Administration			557,301
			HK\$ 7,064,697	
Surplus/(Deficit)			HK\$ (2,327,189)	

The annual budget from 7/2016 to 6/2017 is 18,100,608 HKD. There is a total of 5.9 million HKD spendings on projects from July to November this year. Reserves were used to cover the deficit.

CEDAR is currently supporting its partners in their relief efforts in the Haiti hurricane.

Please support CEDAR's and its partners' work with prayers and donations. 🙏