

Do more with less in Africa

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What is the cost of finding solutions to social challenges in developing economies? What is the cost of poverty reduction in particular? How efficient and effective are existing social intervention models? The short answer: it depends! Every problem and its probable solution are

sensitive to local domain realities. Looking forward into social interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa however, the objective should be reduction of cost, time and uncertainty associated with solving SDGs; by using digital solutions to optimize the [design, deployment and measurement](#) of development initiatives. We need all the help we can get in Africa; and finding development funding should be easier if optimized outcome is largely guaranteed.

My perspective is that observing different dynamics of specific intervention objective, to choose the best path forward; will exponentially improve decision making, resource allocation and donor agency continued participation.

Why is this important

We have seen significant progress in poverty reduction across the globe. Between 1990 and 2015, the population of global poor — people living on less USD1.90 a day declined from 1.85 billion to 736 million people. Nevertheless, 80% of the world's population live on less than USD10 a day, and according to a report, Oxfam estimates that it would take USD60 billion annually to end extreme global poverty. Consequently, [solving all forms of](#)

poverty issues going forward will require smart use of resources, as well as high degree of certainty on outcomes/impact. It demands use of new models that allow solution designers to interact with different aspects of their problem variables and constraints before actual programme formulation.

East Asia and Pacific with poverty estimates of 47 million, and Europe and Central Asia with estimates of 7 million, have seen extreme poverty dropped below 3 percent — significant improvement.

However, extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is troubling. Currently, half of extreme poor people live in Sub-Saharan Africa. 9 million more people became poor in 2015, and about 413 million of them live on less than 1.90 per day. According to reports, if there is no meaningful intervention, by 2030 nearly 9 out of every 10 extremely poor will be living in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Why is it the right approach

Regions that are having meaningful success in their fight against poverty have something in common: they have reliable data sources. Sub-Saharan Africa

lacks reliable, easy-to-use data-sets and updated data sources. It is challenging to deliver any meaningful solution without reliable data.

With the approach discussed here however, programme designers can restrict their search to key [variables and constraints that capture their entire problem space](#), and interact with them from different perspectives to understand which combination will yield maximum impact at acceptable cost.

Secondly, it will allow Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) departments and businesses to [design broader solutions that support levers of their core business](#) — with likelihoods of developing new markets or expanding existing markets. We believe that developing new high-capacity consumer markets in Africa will be challenging going forward without meaningful interventions on poverty reduction — using SDGs as template.

What more can we do

Passive electorate-base increases the cost of poverty reduction in Sub-Sahara Africa. It incentivizes [corruption and 'god complex feeling](#)

among politicians. Decades of neglect and deteriorating socioeconomic awareness for instance, makes it relatively difficult to transform African societies from passive electorate, to active citizens (think Hong Kong) that intellectually and actively, hold power accountable. Such transformation will end the ‘inferior herd mindset’, as well as force a shrink in the ideological distance between elected officials and the people on almost every social issue — from healthcare, education, infrastructure development to access to justice, and rule of law. At that point, elections will begin to really matter. Dissents will be informed and deliberate. Candidates will be required to present manifestos that are carefully drafted, and mirrors the political mood and preferences of the population.

Nevertheless, getting to that point will be quite a ride. It will demand re-education of people on social issues — especially on structural and institutional dimensions (which 15 year olds in Hong Kong are experts at). To achieve such level of mass education, we will need to deploy similar market penetration models used by multinationals to push new products into the global commercial space.

So, we need new models for social intervention design, deployment and measurement. The objective of most SDGs solutions should be to optimize outcome/impact while minimizing time, cost and programme uncertainty. Development financing will remain key to solving Sub-Saharan Africa's needs. Finding strategic ways to minimize — do more with less — resources will be vital to keeping donor agency funds coming. In the end, nevertheless, electorates in the region will need to mature. Learn to understand the issues, vote on the issues and hold elected officials and judiciary accountable on the issues. It will probably be the region's fastest exit door from extreme poverty.