



Economic Development at a New Level

While it may be a slowly emerging trend, it is still somewhat unusual for a center associated with economic development to be housed in a school of management. Such development activity is more typically associated with political science, sociology, or another department in the social sciences. Nevertheless, a vibrant and popular Economic Self-Reliance Center exists in the Marriott School of Management at Brigham Young University. Created nearly four years ago, the ESR Center grew out of development activities undertaken by our faculty and students during the past two decades. The compelling reasons for forming the center were:

1. Most of our students, before completing their undergraduate degrees, spend up to two years as missionaries where they learn to serve others, often to speak another language, and always to love and respect the people they serve. This “coming-of-age” experience usually leaves them with a strong desire

to continue this service orientation during and after their formal university experience.

2. Most members of our faculty have had similar missionary experiences. Some of them have brought the ideals of serving others into their formal research and teaching programs.

3. The sponsoring institution of Brigham Young University, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has, since its inception, been concerned with the welfare of its members and with humanitarian aid projects around the world that benefit those who have neither membership nor interest in the church. In fact, it will soon be possible for any student in the Marriott School to earn a certificate in ethics/social responsibility through the ESR Center by participating in related activities and classes.

On reflection, it makes good sense to have a center for economic self-reliance in a school of management. Management, after all, seeks to teach creative problem solving.

If ever a problem needed creative approaches, helping nearly half the people of the world out of poverty has to be very high on anyone's list. In addition, the problem of poverty is a multidimensional one that may benefit from insights derived from finance, economics, organizational behavior, marketing, supply chain, etc.—all subjects treated in schools of management.

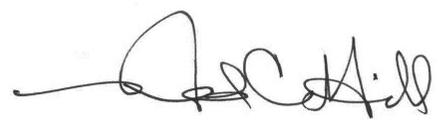
We think it also makes sense that a religiously grounded university should have something important to say about development. At the heart of our belief system is the concept that every person is a child of a loving, caring Heavenly Father. That implies that each individual has enormous potential and is of immeasurable worth. Recognizing that leads to concepts of helping that focus on unlocking an impoverished person's capacity as a creative, self-actualizing being—a being that can solve problems, generate unique ideas, contribute to society, and begin to reach this innate, God-given potential. This

view is optimistic and energizing. In this framework, economic development becomes much more than simply giving money to the poor. The question is not "How much did we give?" but "Did we help individuals and families realize more of their potential?" Of course, that is very difficult to measure, so one concept to help answer that difficult question is "Did we help that person or family become more economically self-reliant?" This is clearly not the only question we can ask, but it is perhaps a good start. Several articles in this issue show how people have worked to define economic self-reliance and why that may be a better measure of the effectiveness of our attempts to help others.

For ten years we have sponsored a conference at Brigham Young University on microenterprise. We felt these were good approaches to helping people become self-reliant. Recently, as we have recognized that microenterprise is only one significant approach to helping the world's

poor, the conference has broadened to the more general idea of economic self-reliance.

As several of the articles in this issue illustrate, the concept of economic self-reliance has the promise of bringing new insight and clarity to our thinking about economic development. It encompasses both tangible and intangible assets as well as individual characteristics and social relationships. We think it has the possibility of bringing economic development to a new level of understanding that acknowledges the innate potential of the individual and directs development activity to forms of helping that are more sustainable and effective than many efforts that have failed in the past.



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