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1957 • 2007



CANADA

Spark of Knowledge

KNOWLEDGE DISCOVERY CHALLENGE
ISSUE STATEMENTS



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THE FOLLOWING AKDN PRIORITY AREAS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR THE KNOWLEDGE DISCOVERY CHALLENGE:

1. CARING FOR THE AGED - AGING IN A SUPPORTIVE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT
2. ULTRA-POVERTY - TURNING THE TIDE OF POVERTY
3. THE ROLE OF MICROFINANCE IN UNLEASHING OPPORTUNITIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
4. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE NEED FOR DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE ENERGY
5. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS - LIMITING THE LOSS OF LIFE AND ASSETS
6. ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE
7. ALTERNATIVE AKDN PRIORITY AREA



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ISSUE CATEGORY #2:

ULTRA-POVERTY – TURNING THE TIDE OF POVERTY

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) #1 is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Its 2007 Report states:

The proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from nearly a third to less than one-fifth between 1990 and 2004. If the trend is sustained, the MDG poverty reduction target will be met for the world as a whole and for most regions. However, we are still far from resolving this problem, let alone ensuring the tide of poverty has turned for the ultra-poor. We need to ensure the ultra-poor have the means so that future generations will improve their lot in life.

Are solutions for the overall poor sufficient for the ultra-poor? To answer this question, a definition of ultra-poor must be identified. Such a definition differs from organization to organization as well as from region to region. How would you define ultra-poor?

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Aga Khan Foundation Canada, under the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC-AKFC) Learning Partnership Project for CFPR/TUP and funded by CIDA, developed a report called *Towards a profile of the ultra poor in Bangladesh*. This report states:

Over a quarter of Bangladesh's people live in extreme poverty, not being able to meet even the barest of the basic needs. They spend most of their meagre, unreliable earnings on food and yet fail to fulfill the minimum calorie intake needed to stave off malnutrition. They are consequently in frequent poor health, consuming further drain on their resources due to loss of income and health expenses. More often than not, the extreme poor are invisible even in their own communities, living on other peoples' land, having no one to speak up for them or assist them in ensuring their rights. Extreme poverty also has a gendered face – they are mostly women who are dispossessed widows, and abandoned.



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The extreme poor are thus caught in a vicious trap and the story of denial and injustices tend to continue over generations for a large majority of them. A vast majority of the extreme poor in Bangladesh are chronically so. The constraints they face in escaping extreme poverty are interlocked in ways that are different from those who are moderately poor. This challenges us to rethink our existing development strategies and interventions for the extreme poor, and come up with better ones that work for them. This is the challenge that drove BRAC to initiate an experimental program since 2002 called, 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra-Poor' program. The idea is to address the constraints that they face in asset building, in improving their health, in educating their children, in getting their voices heard, in comprehensive manner so that they too can aspire, plan, and inch their way out of poverty.

The extreme poor have not only been bypassed by most development programs, but also by mainstream development research. We need to know much more about their lives, struggles, and lived experiences. We need to understand better why such extreme poverty persists for so many of them for so long, often over generations. Without such knowledge, we cannot stand by their side and help in their struggles to overcome their state.

Several factors exist that may impact the ultra-poor including economic and social as well as health and education. How do we help enable the ultra-poor to better access mainstream activities and resources within their countries?

One solution that helps to address poverty, and that AKDN is using today, is micro finance. Micro finance provides a broad range of financial services to over 140,000 of the world's poorest households in 12 countries in Central and South Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

ISSUE STATEMENT

Does the plight of the ultra-poor also impact developed countries? How would you define ultra-poor in Canada? Outline the underlying issues of the ultra-poor in Canada. What are their current barriers/limitations to success? How should we handle these limitations? Identify how we can create sustainable opportunities for the ultra-poor in Canada. Be creative with your ideas.



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