

The road to transformation: a one way street?

A preliminary inquiry into the prevalence of mutual transformation in the Christian community development sector

There are many characteristics that we have copied from the staff, while the staff have stayed the same from the beginning until now.

- Program Participant 1

These people's lives have lessons that I would not be able to learn anywhere else.

- Practitioner 3

Well they send me that stuff because they want to pull my heartstrings and be like, 'Oh, connect with this kid and then pay more money!' whereas I originally signed up for the organisation because I saw what they do as a whole.

- Donor 3

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1. Introduction

There are very few – if any – Christians involved in community development work who don't subscribe to Paul's statement in Romans 3 that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'. This mantra lies close to the centre of the Christian faith and is preached on regular occasion from many an evangelical pulpit; we plead for Jesus' forgiveness and the redemptive work of the Spirit in our lives almost daily. Yet there appears to be a strange dissonance between this marrow in our Christian bones and the way in which many Christian development organisations operate, for there seems to be an unspoken but prevalent assumption that the process of transformation is one-directional, from rich to poor, from donor to 'beneficiaries'. Theologically and theoretically Christian development organisations talk about the 'poverty' of the rich; yet the reports and stories we share, the programs we develop and the targets we set are almost entirely about improving the lot of the economically poor. Is there a difference between our theorised and practised definitions of poverty? If so, why? And if so, how prevalent is this kind of thinking? Can the poor teach the rich? Do the poor already develop the rich? And if so, how do they? How *can* the poor grow the rich when they often live so far apart? What do we miss when we don't practice mutual transformation? What do we gain when we do?

This research project seeks to lift the corner of the page on this issue, capturing an initial snapshot of the prevalence of mutual transformation, and the level to which Christian development organisations foster mutual transformation from the perspective of their program participants, practitioners and donor groups. I will uncover some of the factors contributing to situations of one-way and mutual transformation before highlighting a positive organisational example and putting forward some simple suggestions for improving incidents of mutual transformation in the Christian development sector. Mutual transformation does not seem to be prevalent at present, but with some solid theological reflection and some creative application of that theology we will collectively reflect and participate a little more in the life and mission of our triune God.

1.1 Research question

This research project aims to capture a broad picture of the prevalence of mutual transformation in the Christian community development sector, and to establish whether any mutual transformation that does occur is an intentional or haphazard phenomenon at a personal and organisational level.

1.2 Research impetus

There are three key stimuli for this research project: theological, anthropological and personal.

My interest in the practical implications of theology has led me to previously consider how the doctrine of *Imago Dei* might shape community development relationships. Humanity

was created in the image of the Trinitarian God, a profound model of what it means to be humans in relation to one another (Andrews 2008:8ff). If our relationships follow a trinitarian paradigm, there will an emphasis on the *uniqueness* of each partner held in careful check by the recognition of the *equality* of all members and a *mutual interdependence* on one another's particular gifting (see Boff 2000). If this is the correct paradigm for human relationships, then it will necessarily shape the way Christian development organisations (CDOs) relate to their partner organisations, donors and the poor.

A further theological impetus for this research is the doctrine of sin, and the widely accepted notion that everyone has been damaged by sin and all people are in need of redemption (Grudem 1994:498).¹ Despite our need – personal and corporate – for redemption, God still invites his newly adopted family to participate in his restorative work (see Buxton 2001); We are being repaired while contributing to the wider renovation of all things, the yeast mixing with the dough until both are changed and the rise occurs (Andrews 2008:111; Myers 2011:102). This further drives the imperative for mutual transformation between all actors in the community development sector.²

These theological truths give rise to the anthropological impetus for mutuality which the social sciences recognise as important for human flourishing (see Entwistle and Moroney 2001:299). People do not want one-sided relationships, and reciprocity is a documented necessity for sustaining good mental and relational health (Westen et al. 2006:732, 763). This is particularly pertinent for situations of poverty where the 'god complexes' of the poor *and* the rich need to be addressed: the poor often believe they have failed and have little to offer, while the rich are inclined to believe they are the answer that the poor need (Myers 2011:17, 130). Encouraging mutual transformation is a profound way of addressing both complexes simultaneously.

The final impetus – my personal experience as a donor and practitioner – has been that there often appears to be a disparity between the above and Christian community development practice. I have donated to a number of CDOs in the past decade, and there have been very few who I felt were attempting to foster much growth in me beyond the size of my donations. My role as a community development practitioner has also allowed me to experience some relationships between supporting and implementing CDOs and my experience has been that there is often an unspoken expectation that those with the purse are permitted to make greater demands for change in their partner organisation. This seems to extend to CDO engagement with the poor. As a practitioner, there seems to be an unspoken expectation that the flow of transformation is from practitioner to program participant. I am expected to produce reports detailing positive change in the communities

¹ See McGrath for a helpful overview of historical approaches to sin (2007:362f), noting the common thread of the universal nature of sin.

² Elmer draws on the doctrines of common grace and the priesthood of all believers to come to a similar conclusion (2006:106ff).

in which we work; but I have yet to be asked to produce a report detailing positive change they have done in me.

Despite the expectations and attitudes outlined above, to which I have contributed and remain entangled, I have found that the poor have contributed significantly to my growth in the last ten years; while I believe I have helped to improve the lives of the poor, they have certainly helped to improve my life.

These three things – my understanding of theology, anthropology and my personal experience – led me to wonder whether there is a disparity between CDO theology and practice regarding mutual transformation. Are my experiences of mutual transformation an isolated case, or is it more widespread? Are experiences of mutual transformation personal and spontaneous, or is mutual transformation intentionally fostered by CDOs?

1.3 Research hypothesis

My expectation is that this research will demonstrate that my experience is fairly consistent with various actors engaging CDOs. I expect that mutual transformation is not a common goal organisational relational approaches; or that where notions of mutual transformation do exist, they may struggle to reach beyond the confines of a well-worded, neatly filed document. My expectation is that program participants may have experienced seeing some mutual transformation in the practitioners they engage with, but that they will not have been encouraged to shape or speak into the life of the practitioner. My expectation is that most practitioners would have been partly changed through their interaction with the poor, but that the mutual transformation would not have been due to the encouragement of the practitioner's organisation. Lastly, my expectation for the donor contingent is that their experience would have been almost entirely around donating money, and that there would be a failure to recognise how the poor have helped and served them.

Overall, my expectation is that the majority of organisations in the Christian development scene would subscribe to an ecclesiology of mutuality and maintain that all people are in need of transformation while failing to allow that to permeate their relationships with program participants, practitioners and donors.

2. Literature survey

The question of mutual transformation in community development practice has not received much attention by community development authors; however, it has been touched on by various authors and considered from different angles in different spheres of study, including the social sciences.

Perhaps the most persistent voice on the issue of reciprocity in community development is Robert Chambers, who has long argued for a 'reversal in learning', where professionals 'sit

and listen' at the feet of the poorest (1983:201f). The titles for two of his books, *Putting the last first* (1983), *Putting the first last* (1997) and his quoting of a large section of the former in a 2006 article are indicative of Chambers's belief that initiating mutual learning in community development circles has been a very slow process (Chambers 2006:11ff). Bryant Myers offers a similar quiet but repeated message throughout *Walking with the poor* (Myers 2011:102, 111, 145, 226, 298). Rick James offers a lament regarding organisational relationships between CDOs from the global north and south, suggesting that the learning is typically seen as going from supporting organisations to implementing organisations (James 2001:25, 27; see also Baaz 2005). Ralph Hanger's recent article highlights the continued dependency of African churches on materially developed nations, blaming both parties for the situation (Hanger 2014:23).

From the social science arena, Lister argues that reciprocity is a fundamental, but at times neglected ingredient in distributive justice (Lister 2013:91); movement towards equality and justice necessarily entails a movement towards reciprocity. Hartley examines this concept further, and suggests that reciprocity of mutual respect is a more effective model than reciprocity of mutual benefit (Hartley 2014:430); that *relational* reciprocity has distinct advantages over *economical* reciprocity when correcting injustice. Lastly, Mazelis notes the 'double-edged' sword that reciprocity is, suggesting that while reciprocity builds the important bank of social capital (2015:110) and is a key factor in addressing poverty (2015:127), high levels of expectation can over-burden the poor and further impoverish them (2015:123), particularly when the reciprocating is unbalanced.

Lastly, Westoby and Dowling's recently published *Theory and practice of dialogical community development* (2013) offers an alternative approach to community development that is fundamentally relational; while it is not entirely focused on mutual transformation, their relational approach offers an environment where mutual transformation can readily take place.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research project was undertaken through guided qualitative interviews lasting approximately 20-30 minutes across three contingents: program participants (PPs), practitioners (PRs) and donors (DNs). Each group had a tailored set of open-ended questions aimed at uncovering their experiences of mutual transformation while drawing out their perception of the organisation's posture towards mutual transformation.³ The targeting of PPs, PRs and DNs is designed to uncover the real outcomes of the CDO rather than capture the CDOs' perspective on what they are doing; at times the two do not align.

³ See Appendix 1 for the interview schedules.

A research proposal was submitted to my supervisor, Steve Bradbury and approved by the ethics committee at the Eastern College of Australia. Information sheets outlining the nature of the research and the rights of the respondent were given to all potential interviewees during the scouting phase,⁴ and all respondents were screened to ensure that they were suitable candidates.⁵ All respondents signed consent forms prior to the conducting of the interview.

A total of twenty-three interviews were conducted, and twenty were suitable for analysis. Seven DN interviews were sourced from personal relationships in Perth, Western Australia; eight PR interviews were sourced from fellow students meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and eight program participant interviews were sourced from villages in the province of NTT in Indonesia. I personally conducted the PR and DN contingents, and a close colleague oversaw the PR interviews, and assisted with translating the interview questions and responses. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and then de-identified.

3.2 Respondent demographic

The demographic for the research was quite wide-ranging, demonstrated in the table below:

Contingent	M/F Ratio	Approx. Aver. Age	Approx. Age Range
Program Participants	3:5	46	35-62
Practitioners	4:4	33	25-45
Donors	5:2	38	29-55
Totals	12:11	39	29-62

All DNs were residents of the greater region of Perth, Western Australia, and supporting a total of eight different organisations. The practitioner contingent were residing or working in a total of six different countries, working in a variety of urban and rural settings, for a total of eight different organisations. The practitioner contingent were residing across three different islands in NTT, and participating in programs from six different organisations. Across all respondents, a total of seventeen different CDOs are represented, with five respondents engaging in the same organisation (PR6, DN5, PP2, PP4, PP7).

3.3 Reliability and validity of data

All interviews were conducted in a safe place where the respondent felt comfortable, and the interviews undertaken in a language they were fluent in. All respondents had a clear understanding of the goals of the research project and their ability to withdraw consent at any point without recrimination. Respondents were promised and granted absolute anonymity and were given the opportunity to review the transcript if they wished; PR3 requested a review and made very minor changes to the script. All PR and DN respondents

⁴ See Appendix 2 for information sheet provided to potential respondents.

⁵ See Appendix 3 for the screening criteria.

were also given a summary of the findings and the opportunity to comment on the findings, although none responded.⁶

One interview was rejected due to data reliability concerns (PR5). In transcribing the interview, it was realised that perhaps the interview was attempted in a language the respondent was not sufficiently familiar with. DN7's interview can also not be drawn upon; while the initial data was reliable, the recording was lost, and as some of the findings had been shared with DN7 after the initial interview, it was not appropriate to interview DN7 again, and there was not sufficient time to find an alternative respondent. Lastly, DN4 withdrew consent after the interview had been conducted, citing personal reasons.

Thus three interviews will not be drawn upon for analysis: PR5, DN4 and DN7. All other data is considered to be reliable.

3.4 Data analysis

Once the interviews had been transcribed and de-identified, the transcripts were firstly analysed according to their respective contingent to identify any themes that emerged regarding perceived organisational goals and personal experiences of mutual transformation. The transcripts were then cross-analysed to identify any themes or trends across the three contingents.

3.5 Issues in data collection

A number of issues arose during data collection beyond those already mentioned. A key issue for this research project were the cultural and language barriers between myself and the PP contingent. This issue manifested itself in the question regarding whether the respondent had seen any change in the organisational staff; in Indonesian, the word 'in' (*pada*) can also mean 'under' or 'by', and thus respondents often spoke about the change 'because of' the organisational staff rather than noting change 'in' the organisational staff (e.g. PP3:66⁷ and PP7:76).⁸ This was further hampered by quality control issues due to interviews being conducted in rural settings by field staff who have had little training in conducting interviews, and thus (at times) failed to ask clarifying questions when it was possible that the respondent had misunderstood the question (e.g. PP7:76).

A second issue was the wording of the sixth question for the PRs ("What impact has working with the poor had on you?"), and the similar question for the DNs ("What have the poor given you?"). While I adjusted the question after the first DN interview to, "How have the poor shaped, supported, helped you?", a number of PRs DNs seemed to miss the thrust of the question. It was difficult to ascertain whether they missed the question or whether they

⁶ PPs were unable to be contacted for comment in the short time allocated for feedback.

⁷ PP3:66 = Program Participant 3 interview transcript, page 66.

⁸ There would also have been other linguistic and cultural issues; even the way the questions were presented (forthrightly, individually, formally, abstractly) would have been significant barriers in a culture where indirect group story-telling is the norm.

hadn't ever considered the question. In most cases I re-worded the question if I felt that they had missed it (e.g. PR2:7), but other times I assumed that they had understood the question and were providing an answer that was indicative of their understanding (e.g. PR1:4f).

A third issue related to the DN contingent, wherein the majority had spent considerable time working either cross-culturally or with local marginalised people. This had clearly shaped their perception about people in poverty and their role as a DN in mitigating poverty, and thus my attempt to capture a typical DN perspective may have been somewhat waylaid.

A fourth and final key issue in collecting the data was access to the program participant contingent for feedback. The entire program participant contingent resides in a rural setting away from major infrastructure without email or phone access, and the time allocated for comment (one week) was insufficient for the logistics of translating, sending, accessing, waiting for comment and then sending it back and translating. Thus the program participant contingent was unable to comment on the summary of findings, even though they are the very ones this research paper is aiming to empower. The irony of their being silenced in this manner is not lost on the author.

4. Data analysis and emerging themes

4.1 Program participants

Experiencing transformation

The entire program participant contingent were able to readily identify positive changes that had occurred in their lives, ranging from improved infrastructure (PP4:67), access to water and higher school attendance rates (PP7:75) to increased income (PP1:59; PP5:69) or improved health outcomes (PP2:62). Others observed less tangible changes such as improved relationships, culture and confidence in either themselves or other village members (PP3:65; PP6:72).

Only participant five noted a program that had failed, but even she detailed a few of 'many changes that had resulted from the program' (PP5:69). While almost all of the participant contingent detailed the difficult work that transformation entailed – 'collecting 30 trucks of rock' (PP7:76), 'digging for a week' (PP3:64), – their experience of transformation was that it was both significant and worthwhile:

"There were huge changes that we have experienced from the [program] activities" (PP1:59)

“Absolutely. Initially, almost none of the young girls went to school... Nowadays more girls than boys are going to school” (PP7:75)

“There are many changes resulting from this program... our children eat eggs and chicken meat regularly... we don’t buy vegetables anymore; we grow them ourselves” (PP5:69).

Clearly the PPs saw significant change in infrastructure, livelihood and village relations as a result of the development organisation’s program.

Experiencing marginal mutual transformation

The program participant’s ability to readily recall change in their setting is contrasted by their difficulty in recalling change in the organisational staff during the same period. While PP4 noticed a shift in character of an organisational staff member (PP4:68), a number of other PPs either avoided or misunderstood the question, citing further changes they had experienced in their community (e.g. PP3:65; PP7:76). While the possibility of a misunderstanding cannot be excluded,⁹ a tone of accepted inequality seems to run through the PP transcripts, betraying a silent expectation that change and transformation is for participants, not PRs. PP5 perhaps sums this up best with her answer to the question *have you noticed any changes – big or small – in the organisational staff in the time that you have know them?* She replied:

Since there were changes with us, the staff were happy. When the [corn] program failed, she asked me to try and grow it again (PP5:70).

PP1 offered a similar comment earlier in her interview:

There are many characteristics that we have copied from the staff, while the staff haven’t changed from the beginning until now, although they’ve been able to adapt to life in the village (PP1:59).

Indeed, no change in the organisational staff was seen as a positive situation by PP1:

There have been no changes [in the staff] from the beginning of the program until the group was formed. In fact, the staff have persistently been helping and motivated to help and serve the group (PP1:60).

While I do not wish to denigrate the good work of the PRs or play down the positive practitioner experiences of the PPs, the underlying tone of the PP transcripts appears to echo the saviour complex that seems prevalent in the Christian community development sector. Saviours don’t need transformation – only the economically poor do; have we perhaps taught them to believe this lie as well?

⁹ See section 3.5. It is also possible that the PPs understood the question, but took the question as in the negative: *did they start off well, and then change for the worse after a while?*

Not publicly wishing for mutual transformation

Just two weeks ago my host in a rural village in Eastern Indonesia decided I was tired, and despite my protests that I wasn't, sent me to sleep in the most comfortable bed in her traditional thatched home. As I lay there contemplating her generosity, the conversation on the other side of the rattan wall turned to an analysis of my character and approach. While the assessment was more positive than expected, there were a number of suggested points of improvement for future visits. Moments such as these have taught me that the poor do not always see us as the benevolent gods we are prone to think we are. Thus I was a little surprised at the very polite answers of the PPs when asked whether they wished for any change in the organisational staff:

I don't think so - I never did [wish for any change in the staff] - because the staff were pretty capable (PP4:68).

PP7 offered a similarly positive response while highlighting another (apparent) community inadequacy:

There is something. [It would have been helpful] when we were having a discussion time, [if] they would evaluate the discussion results (P7:76).

Perhaps the 'ask and ye shall receive' mantra does not always apply to finding the opinions of the poor. Smiling and nodding, giving positive answers to questions that may jeopardise future programs are wise survival tactics for a life of scarcity. Although respondents were interviewed by PRs from other organisations, perhaps there were cultural or relational reasons as to why the PPs only gave positive answers to this question.¹⁰ Perhaps it was the 'god-complexes' of the poor; perhaps a survival tactic; perhaps a poorly worded question; possibly all three - but I find it very difficult to believe that the PP's collective experience of PRs was that the PRs were without need of transformation. My experience suggests that the poor do lament practitioner blunders and blind spots, and want better for us (see Narayan et al. 2000:185f); but perhaps more research is required to determine whether this is true in the Eastern Indonesian context.

Undoubtedly gifted

While I don't support a romantic view of the poor, it was encouraging to hear the majority of PPs express some self-awareness about their unique giftedness. PPs pointed out their ability to make certain food products (PP1:60); motivate or train others (PP3:66; PP6:73); their knowledge of traditional medicines and medicinal plants (PP2:62), gardening techniques (PP5:70) and cultural nuances (PP1:60). Only PP4 was unable to articulate their unique abilities, his answer betraying the assumed inferiority of the poor mentioned earlier:

¹⁰ See footnote 4.

No, I've never experienced that situation [of finding something easy that others find difficult] because every time we faced any difficulties, my friends and I went straight to the staff for assistance (PP4:68).

A number of PPs described the way in which they had used their skills or gifts to assist the PRs in their work:

I explained to the staff about the character of the community; that they were not very interested in the program when they started it, because they believed that it was wasting their time. So this was helpful information for the staff to improve their understanding about how to implement the program (PP1:60).

One of the staff asked for an example of a problem, so I immediately asked the staff member if I could help clarify (using the local language) what they had said to the community (PP2:62).

PPs have unique gifts, skills, wisdom and insights that often remain untapped by PRs and CDOs more broadly. Indeed, the wisdom of the PPs is inherently demonstrated in their humble willingness to seek and accept assistance from community development organisations; perhaps it is only the foolish who believe they have nothing to learn from the poor.

4.2 Practitioners

Mixed experiences of mutual transformation

Reflecting the collective experience of the PPs, all PRs were able to readily recall positive change that had occurred in PPs as a result of their work:

[The children] are now saying: 'We know what to do when there are people who want to exploit us' (PR2:7).

Oh yes! Yes, lots of change. I've seen lots of change. Lots of families changing (PR7:30).

While remembering community transformation was an easy exercise for most of the PRs, recalling personal transformation as a result of working with the poor elicited a mixed response. PR6 cited a re-prioritising of financial decisions when asked (PR6:25), and PR8 described a widening of his worldview when prompted - while some PRs spoke of mutual transformation without any prompting. When PR4 was asked *what was the outcome of the program? Did you see some change in the children?* His immediate response was:

One of the outcomes was in me, and how I view [the HIV children] now (PR4:16; see also PR3:10).

However, a number of PRs appeared confused by the question on how the poor had impacted them, or described a feeling of altruism:

Well it uplifts my spirit... If I go back to that experience, I would be encouraged to see that this is what God has done through me and through the rest of the team who worked on that project (PR2:7; see also PR1:5).

When pressed further with the question: *and has it shaped or challenged, has it changed you at all through doing that work?* PR2 replied:

Yeah, primarily my knowledge on the issue of child protection has deepened (PR2:8).

Similarly, PR7 described significant personal change that had occurred through her work with the poor, but the change was through her engagement with the *material* she was presenting to the poor rather than due to her interaction with the poor (PR7:31).

It is significant for this paper that all PRs saw transformation in the communities in which they worked, while experiences of mutual transformation were intermittent.

Relational vs service delivery approaches

A key difference between PRs who readily recalled mutual transformation and PRs who struggled to articulate how the poor had shaped them was in their posture and view of the people they were serving. PRs that readily detailed situations of mutual transformation appeared to have an overall approach that had a personal or relational emphasis:

So what I do is I go to her home and our sessions together are just very casual; like I'll bring some snacks or drinks and we snack and we chit-chat (PR3:11)

... I had to always imagine my own boy in that boy. I had to imagine my niece in that girl... Now I can eat with any HIV infected people... Now I am friends with them (PR4:16)

Have you climbed [the famous] Mountain? It's in [their village]. It's a big tourist attraction. Actually, I would rather spend time talking to the village head than climb the mountain (PR6:24)

Conversely, PRs that struggled to recall how the poor had changed them appeared to have an attitudinal approach that was more along the lines of professional service delivery seeing the PR as a superior:

It's actually a very productive relationship. I'm just thankful to God because the leaders of this church are so humble enough to accept and reflect on some shortcomings in their church (PR2:6)

Because just seeing things like that, and being able to speak hope and life and knowledge, and to find people are hungry, they're drinking in the new things that you are teaching them... (PR7:29)

PR1 seemed to be an interesting anomaly to this, reflecting on the 'love and warmth from the other side...' and describing his relationship with the poor as 'familial' (PR1:3-4) while failing to disclose any situations of mutual transformation and spending considerable time reflecting on the altruistic nature of his work:

And so that feeling comes up sometimes you know, some investment was done eight years ago, and now I can see some of the fruit of it... (PR1:3) so it was very good, and the people were very receptive towards us... (PR1:4).

Despite PR1's description of his relationship with the poor as familial, his overall posture seems be more aligned with an attitude of superiority or professional service delivery; however, it is likely that he is in a stage of transition or is somewhere on the sliding scale between the two approaches. Regardless, PRs that have an emphasis on building relationship and seeing the poor as equals appear to experience deeper levels of mutual transformation than those who maintain a professional distance.

Ad-hoc and personal transformation

A final observation relevant to this paper is the role that CDOs are playing in fostering mutual transformation in the PRs. While almost all of the PRs could relate ways in which their organisation seeks to develop them personally and professionally (e.g. PR2:8; PR7:31; PR8:35), only PR4 described being encouraged to learn from the poor they were serving. However, PR4's clarification seemed to relate more to internal organisational learning than personal growth from the poor:

Learning from this [program] is shared within the organisation... and the leadership of the organisation said, "This is really good, let us continue to do this." So as a result we have identified another group of people to work with... (PR4:17).

*Sorry, I meant more like the process of you learning through helping; that posture of learning... is that something that's been fostered by the organisation?*¹¹

...So basically it's the individual staff who influence the strategy of the organisation, and then the organisation readjusts the structure which re-shapes the individual... we share the individual learning with the organisation, and the organisation makes changes in its policy so that it becomes more intentional in its service to the poor (PR4:18).

¹¹ This attempt at a clarifying question may have been problematic, as it didn't actually mention learning from the poor.

PR6 acknowledged that while her organisation didn't explicitly encourage mutual transformation, it is a 'natural' outworking of good development practice:

I think [the mutual learning] just happened... and maybe in our [organisational] approach, how we do development is also integrated in that process; that whenever you start, you don't talk so much, you listen (PR6:25).

While PR6 deserves commendation for her understanding of good development practice as beginning with a posture of learning, I wonder if her perspective is widely spread among CDOs. My own experience coupled with the PR interviews leads me to believe that PR3 accurately describes the current climate of the majority of CDOs with her observation:

No, I don't think that [mutual transformation] was something that was officially encouraged by the organisation. I think I stumbled upon it as I exposed myself to the poor and allowed myself to be vulnerable to the poor... (PR3:13).

Mutual transformation that does occur seems to primarily be happening on a spontaneous basis, with the PR's depth of relationship with the poor being a possible indicator of the potential for mutual transformation.

4.3 Donors

Mutual transformation for those who have met the poor

A number of DNs were able to articulate ways in which the poor had shaped them personally:

I think they've definitely taught me about community and about that interdependence and inter-related nature of everything (DN1:38).

I think [they've] helped me to see how relationally impoverished I am in coming from a Western background (DN3:46).

...they've had a deep impact on my life... they've taught me a lot. And I think they've also shaped our family (DN5:51).

While the ability of most DNs to recall situations of mutual learning was encouraging, all of the DNs who had experienced mutual transformation indicated that the change that had taken place was due to their personal interaction with the poor (DN1:38; DN3:46). However the DN's held differing opinions as to whether mutual transformation with the poor was possible without personally meeting and engaging with them:

Let's face it: we've all heard stories of poverty, we've all seen the pictures, the video - that's about as close to real life as you can get. But until you are

immersed within that and experience it, and you see it – without the soundtrack in the background, without the cropped and cut and spliced film – it doesn't give you the full picture. And I think for me, that interaction had to happen in that [personal] way [D3:46].

Although DN5's experience of mutual transformation was through personal encounter with the poor, he drew on his own experience of sharing lessons from the poor with other DNs – and seeing them change as a result - to suggest that:

...[personal interaction with the poor] isn't always absolutely necessary. I mean it definitely has an impact, but it's not absolutely necessary that every donor needs to visit the field; I do believe the stories can come back through the organisation (DN5:52).

While the DN's reflections on the role of personal interaction in mutual transformation with the poor are insightful and helpful for this paper, it is worth noting that *no* DNs understood their experience of mutual transformation as being due to their interactions with the CDO they supported.

Perceived organisational agenda: donate and pray

Indeed, no DNs believed that the organisation they supported was aiming to foster a posture of mutuality with the poor. When asked about the nature and goal of the organisational media interactions, a key theme emerged across DN perceptions:

Well they send me that stuff because they want to pull my heartstrings and be like 'Oh connect with this kid, and then pay more money!' (DN1:36).

They don't expect a whole lot from us other than the financial contributions and prayer (DN2:39, 40).

Donate. *And that's it?* I think so. Yeah. It's always for donations. (DN5:49).

DN6 was the only exception, describing their organisation's DN material as an attempt at 'doing the holistic thing':

And that's more like articles on books or articles on projects their doing, or articles on a particular theological subject, or articles on development goals or... so awareness stuff. And then they're also promoting, doing fundraising stuff, and often it's linked in together. So I don't feel like it's particularly clear, like, 'This magazine is...' So they've tried to go down the [holistic] avenue...

This emphasis by CDOs on ‘donate and pray’ is reflected in a number of the donor highlights, which relate to the impact of their giving:¹²

...certain reports back that say, ‘look, this has helped for this and this reason’, and it does lift your spirits... (DN2:40).

I think genuinely feeling like I share in their successes. And not that it’s about me, but knowing that they’re pursuing something that’s a right thing to do, and that they’re making headway (DN3:45).

DN6 again stood out as an exception to the rule – a possible correlate to the organisation’s supporter material mentioned above. DN6’s highlight was regarding the community that the organisation seems to foster around addressing poverty:

And it’s in that community that we were able to kind of encourage and inspire one another to pursue what seems like a harder route rather than just giving money (DN6:56).

While it appears that DN6’s organisation is attempting – and achieving – goals other than simply gaining donations from its supporters, it appears that the majority of DN experiences are indicative of organisations that seek to primarily gather donations and prayers (must it always be in that order?) from their supporters.¹³

Mixed desires for change

All DNs were asked whether they wished the organisation interacted differently with them; essentially seeking to elicit whether they were happy with their DN experience. While all DNs said that they were happy with the level and type of interaction with the organisation (see DN2:41; DN6:57, DN3:45), some interesting paradoxes surfaced. DN1 was ‘pretty happy with the way it works’ (DN1:37) despite feeling that her organisation treated her with a measure of dishonesty and condescension, but because she had personally visited their program, she believed they were doing good work, and would continue to support them:

...like the kids have to write me letters, and then they send a report with the pictures and whatever... and I find that whole thing a bit weird... whereas I originally signed up for the organisation because I see what they do as a

¹² This may seem like an obvious observation to make, but consider these questions: what are we attempting to grow our supporters towards? What kind of self-perception do we want to foster in them? What kind of posture do we want them to have towards the poor? The answer to these will be present in donor perceptions of what it means to be a good donor. If they primarily associate being a good supporter with making a donation, then we have our answer regarding what sort of attitudes and perceptions we are encouraging them towards.

¹³ Some undoubtedly fall somewhere inbetween: DN3 was at pains to distinguish their organisation from others, even though its key encouragements to DN3 were to donate and pray (DN3:44). I wish to avoid painting with too broad a brush here, particularly considering the small sample size.

whole, and I know that the money doesn't just go to that child... I do feel a little dumbled down... (DN1:36, 37).

In a similar fashion, DN5 was happy with the level of interaction despite having a distaste for the marketing material (DN5:49), and needing to regularly tell the DN relations managers to reduce their level of contact:

I understand donor relations managers have got a job to do, they've got targets to fill, but I felt that they were a little too pushy, and once I sat down with them and explained how I felt, they were fine (DN5:48).

And then later:

No. I'm happy with the way they relate (DN5:51).

The picture that seems to emerge from this small sample of DNs is that DNs want their experience to be broader than simply focused on financial giving, and the majority being sensitive to any form of manipulation or ego-boosting. DN2 was perhaps the only exception:

I can understand why they do the ego boosting because... it makes you become personally attached to the work that's being done... and that way you can see what's happening with your money in a very direct way (DN2:40).

While the majority of DNs appear to want their supporter role to involve more, their apparent contentment with the current situation is perhaps indicative of their resilience and commitment to the poor regardless of perceived forms of manipulation, condescension or ego-boosting.¹⁴ However, the tenacity of DN commitment to the poor can feed rather than correct the organisational DN approach: the CDO engages the supporter in ways that are often less than transformative and then the supporter donates regardless, confirming the organisational-donor approach.

Cared for by the poor?

A final observation that arose from the analysis of the DN transcripts was that no DNs mentioned the relationship that they all have with the poor through global trade and politics. Each of the DNs have been 'blessed' and supported by the cheap labour of the poor; the benefits our country has received through interest paid on international loans by the poor; the transfer of environmental degradation by companies our super is invested in; our poaching of their brightest minds while (at least in the Australian context) avoiding their refugees or anyone who might be at risk of drawing on our welfare system; the innumerable

¹⁴ The majority of the DN contingent recruited for this study have an above average concern for issues of justice and poverty; the results would likely vary across a wider demographic.

cheap products we have purchased made on wages we would never get out of bed for (Sogge 2002:30f; George 1997:207ff).

It is possible that this was because the final question wasn't worded well; initially it read *what have the poor or marginalised given you?*, but by the second interview, it had been broadened to *what have the poor given you or helped you or shaped you or served you?* In a post-interview discussion with DN7, he pointed out that the question was put positively, and that this kind of answer would necessarily be a negative reflection; thus it is unlikely that anyone would consider that kind of answer to that kind of question.

While DN7 made a pertinent point and offered a plausible explanation, it does raise questions as to whether organisational supporters see their relationship with the poor as primarily being through their financial giving while failing to see the uglier side of our relationship with the poor. If this is indeed reflective of the current DN climate, then our donations will amount to little more than supplementary feeding programs to keep our distant slave-labourers alive, an unwitting investment of the cruelest kind.

5. Is transformation currently a two-way street?

5.1 'Broad is the way': the larger 'no'

This small study affirms my hypothesis that the prevailing perspective in CDOs is that transformation is a 'one-way' street, seeing resources as flowing primarily from DNs and supporting organisations through implementing organisations and their PRs to their final destination in the lives and communities of PPs. To speak of the 'poverty of the non-poor' has at times become a throw-away line, while relationship with the poor is often seen as a means of improving *their* lot - even by authors calling for greater depth of relationship with the poor:

Accompaniment also means that those who are wealthy develop true friendships with those who are poor, entering into their world, accepting some of their risk, developing equal relationships, and programs *which lead to improved livelihoods for those who are poor* (Lamberty 2015:337, emphasis mine)

This is not an issue of semantics or political correctness. This view of transformation sells the Good News short and negatively impacts all stakeholders. Failing to address this issue will hamper our attempts at addressing situations of poverty and injustice. I will highlight three practical implications here; one for PPs, one of PRs and one for DNs.

Participation and empowerment are common words in the development scene these days, but failing to foster mutual transformation risks scraping out the guts of these words until they ring empty and hollow. True participation and empowerment of the poor requires a reversal of power; they will never experience equality while the flow of learning and

remoulding remains only from 'uppers' to 'lowers'. To teach and critique those we consider superiors is a thoroughly empowering and encouraging experience, building confidence in our (at times deeply suppressed) knowledge that we are unique and have something to contribute. I expect that CDOs which come to poor communities with an openly declared goal of mutual transformation will see greater improvements in self-confidence and empowerment than those who come bearing a posture of one-way transformation.

PRs also stand to lose from one-way streets, and will fail to reach their full potential without seeking the insight and influence of PPs. Learning from the poor is often encouraged by CDOs, however, it seems to be primarily aimed at improving the local strategy and programs of the CDO (e.g. Corbett and Fikkert 2009:142ff). But PPs also have great insights into the personal blind spots, weaknesses, hypocrisies and biases of PRs and the CDOs they represent. While falling asleep behind the rattan wall might make for a more pleasant experience, we will be living in a world of dreams and miss out on significant personal and professional development. Mutual transformation makes for cheap and effective PD days (see Irvine et al. 2006:64, 70).

Lastly, donors who are encouraged to view transformation as one-directional stand to perhaps lose the most. Imbibed in dominant cultures that worship individualism, pleasure, opulence, dualism, self-determination and relativity, it is difficult for donors to live kingdom values that run counter to those lines, often relying on people within the same dominant culture to show and teach alternatives. The perspectives of the poor are a great opportunity to unmask the pretenses of the rich, helping us to see ourselves 'more clearly as in a mirror' though we might be frightened by our own appearance once the fog of self-delusion is wiped away.

CDOs practicing one-way transformation will not reach their full potential. They will reinforce the marred-identities of the poor and the 'god-complexes' of the rich and place a wedge between their theology and practice, making them look more like a twin than the cousin of their secular counterparts. They will fail to address the twin engines of poverty – power and relationships – and have a skewed practice of transformation.

While there are exceptions, it appears that the prevailing view among CDOs is that transformation is a one-way street. I have highlighted three implications of this approach, and undoubtedly there are more. But I have attempted to demonstrate that this is no minor concern, and that failing to address this issue will hamper CDO poverty-alleviation efforts.

5.2 Factors contributing to one-way streets

A number of factors have contributed to the prevailing trend of viewing transformation as flowing in one direction only. My interest and background in theology lends me to suggest that insufficient theological reflection – and particularly a failure to apply that theology - is

the initial fork in the road wrongly taken; and thus I will make that my starting place, and consider some other factors surrounding and intertwined with this issue.

While the social sciences have certainly helped to positively shape and improve Christian community development practice over the last three or four decades, at times it seems that CDOs have taken on their methodologies and perspectives at the expense of theological reflection (Myers 2011:231). When CDO's start taking their cues from sources that don't have a biblical foundation, we start navigating by a different map, and end up in places we never intended. An example of this is the way in which many *practiced* CDO definitions of poverty and development have been heavily influenced by secularism and its obsession with economics as the measure of a full and good life (see Shanin 1997). While economics is a key aspect of poverty, focusing almost entirely on economics in targets, monitoring, reporting and donor relations sends the silent message that the rich aren't impoverished and only the economically poor are, painting bold arrows that only point globally north on the road to transformation.¹⁵

A second factor contributing to the prevailing view of transformation as one-way is the professionalisation and commercialisation of care for the poor, a very recent development in the overall history of the church.¹⁶ While this has improved our practice on a number of fronts, it has also contributed to notions of transformation as a one-way street (Elmer 2006:91). As PR6 noted, most community development organisations now have 'policies on the limits of our relationship' with the poor (PR6:23). Calling ourselves 'professionals', ensuring that we are 'qualified', having targets and fine-tuned processes, speaking about 'best practice' and using community development jargon, keeping up-to-date with the latest approaches, techniques and authors are not necessarily bad things in and of themselves; but they *can* create a climate where we see ourselves as possessing knowledge, wisdom and insight in greater measure than those we are called to serve. I put my hand up as one perpetually struggling with this debilitating disease. Professionalism can improve our practice, but it risks blocking our ears to the wisdom, knowledge and critique of the poor (Chambers 1983:23).

A third and final factor is PP and DN feedback to CDOs. I suggested earlier that PPs were reluctant to point out areas PRs needed to work on. Similarly, while the majority of DNs made it clear that they disliked it when or if their CDO used manipulative or ego boosting material to elicit donations, they all said they were happy with the nature of their relationship with the CDO. It appears that CDOs are at times struggling to receive honest

¹⁵ See Getu 2002 for a broader list of indicators that his micro-finance organisation is seeking to use to ensure there is integrity between their definition of poverty and the indicators they use to evaluate their work.

¹⁶ I also wonder if the movement to para-church activity has meant less attention has been given to practicalities of poverty alleviation by theologians because now it is further outside of their sphere of influence.

critique from PPs and DNs regarding the nature of their relationship.¹⁷ If stakeholders publicly state that the CDO has no need for change, the CDO is unlikely to consider change.

I would argue that underlying each of these factors is the failure to allow our theology to fully permeate CDO practice, and what is needed is the recovery of the distinctiveness that our Christian faith brings to poverty alleviation attempts.

5.3 'Narrow is the path': the smaller 'yes'

Despite the apparent prevalence of a one-way view of development and transformation, this small study also demonstrated that my experience isn't unique, and that there are folks – PRs *and* DNs – who have not only found themselves shaped by the poor, but expressed an appreciation for the process. My personal engagement with the poor has been responsible for a number of shifts in perception, theology and lifestyle that I'm not sure would have happened otherwise; and I offer a few personal examples here as a taster for the many ways in which the economically poor can assist in the necessary transformation of the non-poor.¹⁸

In a similar vein to some of the experiences of the PRs and DNs interviewed for this study, the poor have re-shaped my perceptions of relationship and Christian community more generally. I was raised to be highly independent and individually-oriented, with a strong sense of personal responsibility. This permeated my worldview and theology; salvation was seen as a personal event; people were considered entirely responsible for their own development, and so long as I was travelling well, the world could be considered at peace.

However, being invited to partake of Indonesian community life, and being a regular recipient of rural hospitality has resulted in some radical reshaping. It has softened the way I carry conversation to the point that I've almost had to renounce my Fresian heritage.¹⁹ Relationships are beginning to take priority over productivity, and individual salvation has taken a back seat while thinking about and attempting kingdom-shaped Christian community is now the driver for my understanding of the purpose of the Church. The evidence of this has manifested itself in various – at times interesting – ways: a few months ago, my 5 year-old son suggested that we edit the children's song *Jesus loves me* to 'Jesus loves us, this we know, for the Bible tells us so.'

The poor have also taught me about the inter-relatedness of life, and the tangible nature of faith, helping me to make far more sense of the Old Testament narrative and its importance

¹⁷ While the PPs and DNs are in part responsible for not seeking to develop the CDO further, the CDO's appraisal methods are sometimes questionable. I recently was asked to participate in a survey about the nature of my relationship with a CDO, but the survey was geared towards eliciting responses about how the CDO can make my donor experience better ('how would you like to hear more about the impact your donation is making?') so that I could donate more and/or my experience could be used to engage new donors.

¹⁸ Again, I do not support a romantic view of the poor; I have seen plenty of greed, manipulation and injustice in my wanderings through rural Indonesia.

¹⁹ Fresians are considered to be the most pig-headed and forth-right of the Dutch population. My family emblem is three wild boars, and 'Bergsma' means 'determination' (Bergsmas like to note it means 'determination' and *not* stubbornness).

for today. The Exodus event, the Passover, the stories of kings and the prophets who railed against them; the tangible nature of sin and the way it permeates politics, water and land ownership – these things come alive in the presence of the poor. They’ve birthed long evenings of husband-and-wife discussions around the implications of the kingdom of God for our life choices, priorities and finances. Wrestling over the purchase of a piano is far more difficult when people who call you *menantu* - ‘son-in-law’- will be going hungry while you tinker the keys. We would never have considered the relationship between pianos and poverty without encountering the radical generosity and tenacious existence of the poor. But our life, my life is certainly richer for the wrestling.

In similar fashion to the other PRs, I do believe that my work in Indonesia has for the most part meant positive change to the poor, and I’m thankful to have been a part of that. But the work has been profoundly good for myself, and I believe the impact has extended – to varying degrees – to those I call friends and family.

While Dr. Melba Maggay has rightly said that community development work has a tendency to turn people into some of the most cynical people around (in Myers 2011:234), I am learning that it also has the potential to turn some of the most greedy and inward looking people into something more like the image of Jesus. One way to do this is by intentionally creating more space for mutual transformation.

5.4 Factors contributing to mutual transformation

As already noted, priority for relationship was a common theme among the PRs – and even among the DNs – who articulated ways that the poor had shaped them. PRs who had relayed situations of mutual transformation shared multiple stories that reflected their enjoyment of living among the poor; sharing a meal, wedding and funeral invitations, chatting about things other than ‘the program’ with PPs. Those who had been shaped by the poor had gotten relationally close enough that their concern for the PPs went beyond the distanced empathy of professional service delivery, and entered them into that dangerous sphere of friendship where the twin bellows of mutuality and reciprocity keep the relational fire alive. Once the arms of professionalism are uncrossed it’s only a short distance to the heart: it’s little wonder that these people encountered mutual transformation. It wasn’t that they *gave up* their professionalism – read PR4’s example of engaging church leaders (PR4:14), or PR6’s commitment to the slow road of community empowerment (PR6:23f) – it’s that they didn’t allow their professionalism to foster superiority in their hearts or relational distance in their encounters with the poor (see Baaz 2005:110ff).

A second factor that contributed to situations of mutual transformation seems a healthy recognition by the PR or the DN of their own brokenness, limitations and need for redemption (PR3:10f; PR4:17; PR6:24). This fostered a healthy self-suspicion and a knowledge that they don’t have all the answers, and that even some of the answers they do have may be wrong. This posture creates the necessary space for genuinely listening to

alternative ways of viewing life and weighing them carefully against their own understanding and interpretation of biblical teaching. Again, this doesn't mean that the PR or DN came empty-handed to the poor; they had something to contribute – insights, resources, methods that the PP hadn't previously considered – but they were able to hold that in tension with a deep-seated belief that they also weren't Jesus just yet.

A final but pertinent factor was that of direct encounter with the poor. PRs and DNs who had experienced mutual transformation had been in direct contact with the poor. This raises questions for this study, particularly in regards to whether it is possible for CDOs to encourage mutual transformation in DNs who are unlikely to ever encounter PPs: can people be shaped by someone they've never met? Is direct relationship a requirement for mutual transformation? Is it possible for DNs to be challenged and transformed by the resources of the poor through a third party? The way in which we are able to admire, follow and be significantly shaped by international authors, preachers and speakers whom we have never met suggests that it is indeed possible although, as DN5 suggested, the impact may not be as deep or as immediate as a personal encounter (DN5:52f). Perhaps more creative thinking and trailing of new approaches is needed in this area; I will offer a few suggestions shortly.

6. Looking forward

6.1 A positive organisational example

Despite the prevalence of viewing transformation as a one-way street, there are CDOs who are attempting mutual transformation, and I wish to briefly highlight one such organisation to further demonstrate that an organisational posture of mutual transformation is possible and not just a romantic or hypothetical notion.

I first encountered the work of TEAR Australia when I attended an Oxfam event in my local area and heard Phil Sparrow talk with emotional honesty about his time in Afghanistan. Since then we have become supporters of TEAR, and have been regularly impressed with the way that they engage us as supporters - from their Target magazine to the integral lives of the church engagement staff and the types of events that TEAR hosts - our sense is that they want to foster a deep concern for the broader kingdom of God in our hearts and lives, starting with the poor. The fact that we financially support TEAR is something of a non-event; what has loomed larger in our interactions with TEAR is the ways in which we have felt challenged to consume less and advocate more, to live more simply and shop ethically; to consider the implications of the kingdom of God for every aspect of our lives. We feel that we have given *and* received; been a blessing *and* been blessed. Our relationship with TEAR extends far beyond the swapping of a donation for a pat on the back; we feel that it has been an act of reciprocal relationship, participating in a global Christian community trying to live along God's lines in a broken, beat-up world. We feel TEAR is facilitating a very important conversation in our lives.

Thus it *is* possible to allow our theology to permeate our organisational practice; TEAR seems to be attempting that – no doubt with some lumps and imperfections. The narrow path of mutual transformation is not merely an idealistic abstraction, but an entirely implementable practical theology if we are brave enough to attempt it.

6.2 Restoring Christian distinctives in Community Development

I have argued that the prevalence of one-way street thinking in Christian community development circles is in part due to a movement away from theological reflection and a too ready embrace of secular approaches to development. We must decide what we want to shape our practice – biblical hope or secular optimism, and they are poles apart (Wright 2007:93). While there will naturally be areas of overlap in the outworkings of the two approaches, and there is plenty of learning that can be taken from the social sciences, our theology must be the paradigm through which we understand and address the issue of poverty (Myers 2011:47).²⁰ I will briefly highlight three distinctives of the Christian worldview that are if allowed to permeate our practice, will assist in developing postures of mutual transformation. The first relates to our vision and mission; the second relates to our strategy and the third relates to our identity as we go about our work.

God restoring all things

At the risk of repeating Myers' work, the over-arching biblical narrative must be the over-arching CDO narrative: the story of God restoring all things (Myers 2011:55f). I often hear CDO representatives quoting passages of Scripture that command us to care for the poor; and while these are good parts of Scripture for the rich to reflect on, DNs must be taught to place those passages in the over-arching narrative. When we fail to understanding caring for the poor in light of the larger story, we risk encouraging people towards charity and viewing transformation as purely economical development instead of the broader wholeness indicative of the kingdom of God (see Samuel 2002; Byworth 2003; Thacker 2015). We need to have this story as our vision and filter for life, exploring its various implications for all stakeholders: *God restoring all things*. God restoring *all* things. When we place everyone in that narrative, and allow it to shape our collective existence, we will likely see change in the lives of DNs, PRs *and* PPs. The Bible offers so many calls to care for the poor, and DNs, PRs and CDOs need allow those passages to sink down to their bones; but those calls to care for the poor bear testimony to the larger story and are not an end in themselves, even if they are the starting place in God's strategy of restoration.

Putting the last first

Jesus' posit that the 'last are first' in the kingdom of God was far more than just an interesting quip; it was the summary of God's age-old methodology. Jesus was born in Nazareth (*what good comes out of Nazareth?*), spent the bulk of his time in backwards Galilee, commissioning social outcasts and friends and personal representatives. Jesus' demonstration that the last *are indeed* first in the kingdom of God was a simple continuation

²⁰ Myers' *Walking with the poor* is an excellent example of theologically-shaped development.

of God's movements throughout the Old Testament: this has always been God's strategic method.

This methodology of God, supported by the Apostle Paul's warning that God uses the 'foolish' to shame the 'wise', must be permitted to significantly shape the way in which we attempt community development – for if these words of Jesus' don't apply in this context, where do they? In God's economy, the poor and marginalised are rich resources to be drawn upon. More practical reflection by one-way CDOs needs to be done on this profound Christian principle, for it runs entirely counter to the dominant culture in the global north with its subscription to a neo-liberal market and the 'survival of the fittest'. Yet if the 'last' really are 'first' in the madness of God's way of working, then we must explore the implications of this paradigm for our own methodology, for we claim to be working with and for Him.

Imago Dei

A third unique Christian doctrine relevant to this study is the understanding that humanity has been made in the image of a trinitarian God. I will only touch on this doctrine very briefly as I have argued elsewhere that this doctrine has relational implications for the way we operate as CDOs bringing emphases on equality, unique giftedness and mutual interdependence (Bergsma 2016). It would be very difficult for CDOs, DNs and PRs to avoid mutual transformation if they regularly reflected on the practical, relational implications of this doctrine. While equality is a regular catch-cry of secularism, mutual interdependence is less so, particularly in the global north where individualism is a beloved demi-god. The relational implications of *Imago Dei* are an important Christian distinctive that would foster mutual transformation and ultimately enhance our attempts at poverty alleviation.

6.3 Practical suggestions for developing mutual transformation

I now wish to briefly put forward a few practical suggestions for CDOs to demonstrate that mutual transformation is indeed possible, and need not require significant structural changes to the way the CDO operates.

In PR-PP encounters

If theology must shape our practice, then it is logical that CDOs provide space for theological training and reflection to be done with PRs regarding their relationship with PPs.²¹ This need not be complicated or extended training, but would be aimed at allowing the biblical *why* of doctrines like those outlined above to shape the relational *how* for PRs engaging with PPs (Myers 2011:230f).

The biblical *why* must also be permitted to re-shape some of the policies, targets and reporting structures developed for PRs in ways that encourage and create space for the PR to listen and learn from PPs – for their personal development as well as for the normal

²¹ I recognise that not all CDOs have PRs working directly with PPs; but would be appropriate for all organisational staff who work directly or indirectly with PPs.

program development (Myers 2011:226). CDOs could hold annual events where PPs assist in appraising CDO staff, approach and technique, forcing a reversal of the learning process; a number of organisations are already doing this with success (Chambers 2005:78; see Pastuer and Scott-Villiers 2006:94ff). Further to this is the need to ensure that our participatory rhetoric aligns with reality, while assisting PRs to be aware of and use their power in the PR-PP encounter to empower PPs (Chambers 2005:114).

Lastly, CDOs could create space at staff retreats and/or reviews for PRs to share stories of mutual transformation. As a PR, I was deeply encouraged through hearing the stories of the other PRs during the interviews for this research paper, while also finding some of their reflections and techniques for mutual transformation helpful for my own attempts at learning from the poor. Creating an expectation for mutual transformation stories will likely heighten PR sensitivity to opportunities for learning from PPs.

In CDO-DN encounters

Again, my suggestion for fostering greater mutual transformation in CDO-DN relationships would be to begin with providing more theological teaching and encouraging theological reflection in DNs. This is particularly pertinent for those DNs who have deeply embedded saviour and superiority complexes, for which CDOs have at times been partially responsible. This could be done at a number of levels; through newsletters, annual conferences, at fundraising events and church or community presentations.

Coupled with the above is a need for a radical overhaul of donor material that moves away from stroking egos and moves towards helping DNs see the way they are both reducing and creating poverty. We need to move from creating donor *marketing* material to creating donor *transformational* material, and take our cues from Christian development principles rather than current, 'effective' marketing techniques. Our engagement with DNs could easily move beyond 'donate and pray' to a whole raft of other poverty alleviating activities DNs can be involved in and learn about: advocacy, living simply, sustainable consumption, self-reflection, investing and purchasing ethically, theological reflection, articles on the practical implications of the kingdom of God. We must develop a transformational agenda for our DNs that short-circuits opportunities for DNs to give with their left hand and take more with their right hand, and then share those stories across the CDOs activities. Perhaps CDOs could balance stories of PP transformation with more stories of DN, CDO, PR and environmental transformation: if the over-arching biblical narrative is that *everything* needs redemption, let our newsletters and stories reflect that narrative in corresponding measure.

Lastly, CDOs bring PPs over to their DN base from time to time to share stories of PP transformation and to promote the work of the CDO. This opportunity could readily be expanded with little effort to create space for the PP to provide teaching to DNs on a range of topics, including a biblical critique of the social trends in the DN's dominant culture. It is only once we've moved beyond 'donate and pray' that we can rightly begin calling our donor groups 'supporters' or 'partners'.

Thus I wish to stress that fostering mutual transformation is entirely within the reach of CDOs; there are numerous small steps that can be taken to improve the current situation, and these are only a taster – unleash the artists and the creatives, and many more ideas would undoubtedly come forward!

7. Suggestions for further research

One of the limitations of this study has been the sample size; while it supports my hypothesis, further research on a larger scale would be necessary before any strong conclusions could be drawn. It would also be helpful to examine whether CDOs believe they are attempting mutual transformation, and to examine whether there is a disparity between their understanding of what they are attempting and the perspectives of PPs, PRs and DNs.

Further research is also required to determine whether PPs do in fact believe PRs and CDOs are without need of transformation. A higher level of trust between PP and interviewer would be required to ensure that PP answers are not obscured by fear of recrimination or other factors, and the research may need to be conducted by people who are independent of community development organisations.

It could also be helpful to further examine what CDOs mean by ‘transformation’ and how that aligns with their practice: do they understand transformation in primarily economic terms, or do they have a holistic, integrated understanding of transformation? How does their *theorised* understanding of transformational development align with their *practiced* understanding? What definitions of poverty and transformation would arise out of an independent analysis of CDO targets, reporting structures, strategic plans, SP-IP relations and marketing material? Answering these questions would help uncover discrepancies between our theory and practice that contribute to one-way streets.

Lastly, further research is required to examine ways in which mutual transformation can occur without a personal encounter. This is a pertinent question particularly for the DN contingent, and this research could assist CDOs in creatively finding ways to encourage mutual transformation in their supporter base.

8. Conclusion

This small research project supports the hypothesis that many CDOs do not encourage mutual transformation in their relationships. However, it has also demonstrated that mutual transformation – where it had occurred – is preferable and beneficial for all stakeholders involved. This study also highlighted that PPs are the most willing to experience transformation, and have thus benefited most, while also noting that a number of PRs and DNs had benefited and grown due to their interactions with the poor. It appears

that many CDOs have limited their engagement with DNs to the simple mantra 'donate and pray', while failing to foster notions of mutual transformation. It appears that this is due to the influence of secular approaches over the contribution theological reflection can make to Christian development practice. However, some organisations are attempting and experiencing mutual transformation, demonstrating that it is possible to marry theology with practice. While the implications of mutual transformation are far-reaching, there are numerous, simple ways in which CDOs can move their organisation – supporters and all – towards *ekklesia*, the global community and body of Christ where distinctions between PPs, PRs and DNs are blurred and we are genuinely able to call one another 'sister' and 'brother'.

May Gillard's *Servant Song* be heard through our every community development interaction:

Will you let me be your servant,

Let me be as Christ to you?

Pray that I might have the grace

To let you be my servant too.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Program participant contingent

Question 1: Please share your story about how you got involved with this program

Question 2: Please share the story of when you first met the organisational staff involved with this program.

Question 3: Please share one or two stories about your time with the organisational staff involved with this program.

Question 4: Has this program resulted in any change for you? If so, what sort of changes have occurred?

Question 5: Have you noticed any changes, big or small, in the organisational staff in the time that you have known them? Please share any stories.

Question 6: Have you been able to share any of your knowledge with the organisational staff? Do you feel that the organisational staff have learnt from you?

Question 7: What do you think it would be helpful for the organisational staff to learn about? What do you wish they asked you to teach or show them?

Question 8: What tasks or things do you find easy and enjoyable to do that other people find difficult to do? What do people seek your help or advice for?

Practitioner contingent

Question 1: Please briefly outline your role and how you got involved with it. If you are involved in multiple programs, please describe one of them.

Question 2: In reference to the program just mentioned, please share the story of when you first met the program participants; where was it, what were the people like, what were your first impressions?

Question 3: Please describe the nature of your relationships with the program participants.

Question 4: Please share one or two stories that have been highlights of your time with marginalised or poor people.

Question 5: Please share one or two stories of transformation that you have seen in your work with the poor.

Question 6: What impact has working with the poor had on you?

Question 7: In what ways does your organisation actively seek to grow you as a person?

Donor contingent

Question 1: Please share the story of how and why you got involved with this organisation; if you are involved with a number of organisations, please focus on one that you are most familiar with.

Question 2: What has been the nature of your relationship with this organisation? What does your relationship with this organisation involve?

Question 3: Do you receive any media (magazines, updates, emails, video links) from this organisation? What do you feel is the purpose of this contact? What does the organisation want you to do?

Question 4: What's it like being a donor? Share a story (if you can) about a highlight of being a donor.

Question 5: What impact has being a donor had on you?

Question 6: Are there any ways in which you wish the organisation you support related to you?

Question 7: What have the poor or marginalised given you?

Appendix 2: Information sheet for potential respondents

This research project is based on two biblical assumptions:

- 1) All people are uniquely gifted and designed to be mutually interdependent
- 2) All people are in need of transformation

This research project is seeking to understand whether mutual transformation – the idea that all people contribute towards one another's growth into the image of Christ – occurs in the community development context, and whether mutual transformation is a part of the Christian transformational development agenda.

Your participation in community development work means that your experiences and insight would be suitable and helpful for the goal of this research project. There are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions, this research project simply wants to listen to your story and experience of transformation and mutual transformation.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions by the interviewer that will take about 20 minutes to complete. Your responses will be recorded and then transcribed and then de-identified. You will remain anonymous throughout the study, and any information that could help someone identify you will be removed.

You will have the right to remove your participation and your interview responses at any point, without needing to give any reasons for your removal of consent. If you wish to do this, you can simply contact me using the details below. If you feel at any time that I have not answered your concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor below.

You will also be given a summary of the research findings to comment on before the research paper is submitted, and any comments that you wish to make will be included in the final research paper. Your assistance is really appreciated, and has the potential to help everyone involved in the community development sector to change their mindset about how the transformation process works. I thank you sincerely for your time and your willingness to share your story.

Kind regards,

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Supervisor:

Steve Bradbury

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Appendix 3: Participant Screening

'Beneficiary' contingent:

- ☐ Participant currently involved in community development program from a Christian organisation or involved in the past two years.
- ☐ Participant is not involved in a program associated with the interviewer.
- ☐ Participant and interviewer have a common language they are both fluent in.
- ☐ Participant clearly understands the purpose of the research, and understands their right to withdraw consent at any time.
- ☐ Participant has suitable means of contact (e.g. phone, email) for raising concerns with either the interviewer or a third party, including the research supervisor.

Practitioner contingent:

- ☐ Participant is not involved in an organisation associated with the interviewer.
- ☐ Participant spends considerable time among 'beneficiaries' as part of their role.
- ☐ Participant and interviewer have a common language they are both fluent in.
- ☐ Participant clearly understands the purpose of the research, and understands their right to withdraw consent at any time.
- ☐ Participant has suitable means of contact (e.g. phone, email) for raising concerns with either the interviewer or a third party, including the research supervisor.

Donor contingent:

- ☐ Participant is not involved in an organisation associated with the interviewer.
- ☐ Participant has been supporting a Christian organisation for at least two years.
- ☐ Participant clearly understands the purpose of the research, and understands their right to withdraw consent at any time.
- ☐ Participant has suitable means of contact (e.g. phone, email) for raising concerns with either the interviewer or a third party, including the research supervisor.