

Create Conference
20-24th June 2022
Nairobi

Introduction

The Create Conference in Nairobi was the outcome of a partnership between Centre for Building Better Community (CBBC), the Informal Settlements and Cities Consortium (ISCC) and World Evangelical Alliance Business Coalition (WEABC). The partnership evolved from conversations between the entities about the role of finance and business in the development of communities, particularly in the majority world.

A steering group consisting of people from Zambia, Germany, Pakistan, Kenya, Argentina, England and Australia was formed. The original vision was to hold the gathering in Poland the week before the World Urban Forum. However, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine we sought to move the conference to Nairobi. This move had pros and cons. One significant con was the inability of some of the steering group to cover the cost of the re-location, which involved extra travel for them. Positively, the move to Nairobi, Kenya was a shift to a majority world country that illustrated some of the core issues the Create Conference was hoping to address. Namely, with best intentions there is a propensity for major funders and large NGOs in particular to come into a community they perceive needs development with an agenda for that development. This led to the core question of the conference: 'What is the nexus between business / financing and community led, strength- based development towards the creation of flourishing communities?'

Flowing from this question, the core aims of the Conference were to

- Create an ongoing process that allows the development of solid life- giving relationships between community development practitioners and business people/funders
- Bring strength- based community development and business together to create a flourishing future globally
- Model approaches to investment that empowers and benefits the whole of community
- Advocate for a holistic approach to development that includes economics but doesn't centre on it

From the start it was seen as a working conference. There was minimal input from 'experts' and there was opportunity for the temporary community that gathered to share their knowledge and experience, and think together on how the above nexus could best work. At the very beginning of the conference faith was added to the nexus so the focus became: 'How can business, community and faith work together towards the creation of flourishing communities?'

Conversation Starters

In the lead up to the conference there were three webinars with associated short podcasts that illustrated and focused on the issues of the conference.

1. Stating the Problem

The podcast asked the question, 'What's gone wrong with financing in the majority world?' The question refers to good intentions that are actually disempowering, where a funder or an NGO comes from the outside, sees something they think is a need and seeks to solve it without community participation. The focus is on immediate cause and effect solutions. The podcast discusses stories where external intervention has led to disrupted lifestyles and cultures, and ultimately failed projects and wasted budgets. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) was shown to provide an alternative to trying to fix from the outside; instead, it would nurture communities from the inside out.

2. How Can Business Have Got it so Right and so Wrong?

Following a similar theme, this podcast raised issues of investment capital from the West being given to expatriate founders. These entrepreneurs have only a superficial understanding of the community they are working with. Forthcoming tech solutions fail because there is a lack of understanding of social and cultural paradigms. In contrast local entrepreneurs with lived experience of the problems and the community do not receive the opportunities and capital to make a real difference.

In Latin America companies have come from other countries with a big disconnection from the local communities. The companies have a feel of prosperity however, have no meaningful interaction with the community. Psychologically, the owners of the company are seen as the boss men with all the money, creating dependency within the community. If the business is to leave, the community will be left in a worse state. In many cases people from the country of origin of the company are the ones employed.

A better way forward is for the company or funder to minimise dependence on outside resources whilst finding ways to support local entrepreneurs, with the starting point being the communities not the capital.

3. Whose world is it?

The foundation of giving is recognising that everything we have personally and across the world is a gift from God. Our role is to be stewards and custodians. However, the motivation for giving can be skewed into unhelpful responses. Many Christians base their giving on scripture, which for them shows the importance of helping where there is need. The gospel is a giving gospel with the gift of Jesus at the heart. As well, many see that giving to the needy is giving to Christ.

One of the blocks to giving that arises is the Christian community taking on the values of the world. These include consumerism and working hard to earn what you have. However, giving needs to be out of response and be done wisely with no hint of superiority.

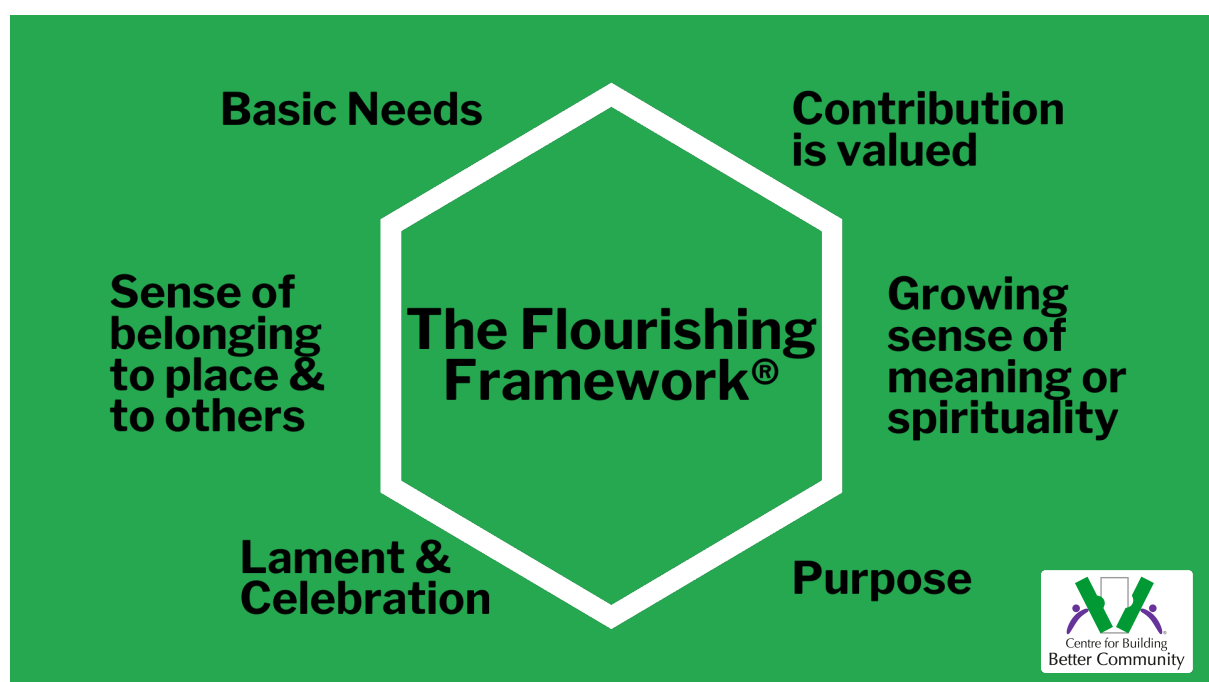
This is seen as wise giving and is connected to helping poor communities realise that they too have been given good gifts from God; talents, resources, abilities, natural resources. This begins to cultivate a different world view.

The Conference Proper

Each day of the conference had a clear theme: Day 1 Flourishing Communities; Day 2 Strengthening Communities; Day 3 Building Collaborative Processes Between Business, Faith and Community. These themes related to the aims of the conference and inspired conversations towards new understandings.

Day 1: Flourishing Communities

The group spent time exploring the Hebraic concept of shalom and its relationship to the creation of flourishing communities. A model of flourishing was proposed by CBBC.



Discussion was started around the following questions

- If flourishing communities are the goal, what do CD practitioners, business people and churches each bring to the table?
- When are these qualities helpful / harmful?
- How can there be mutuality in the relationships between these 3 groups?
- What would true collaboration look like?

CD practitioners bring skills, the ability to analyse needs (although this was seen as potentially unhelpful), resources, development activities, capacity building and advocacy.

Churches bring right thinking and theology, biblical teaching, the ability to share resources, Christian principles, neighbourhood care, spiritual and social capital, networks, places for community engagement, value, the ability to know and address needs, the ability to work between faiths and within one faith, community presence, and advocacy.

Business people bring economic capital, the ability to create wealth, business training and apprenticeships, job creation and growth, the ability to adapt to shocks, nimbleness, goods and services.

The group recognised that each category- CD practitioner, churches and business people- made helpful and unhelpful contributions to the community. Churches were seen to be holistic, having a diverse voice, authority to speak, solid theology and seminaries, as well as having the ability to collaborate. Negatively, they have a tendency to spiritualise development, they can be owned by the agenda of their denomination, they prioritise particular skills and they compete for converts.

CD practitioners can be seen as leaders in the community, being able to help analyse what is happening in a community, work with the assets of the community, advocate and share networks. They help develop sustainable community processes. Unhelpfully, they can have a lopsided view of development, can focus on needs, can be controlling and can create dependency.

Businesses and business people can complement what is happening in the community, however they can compete, be selfish and use cheap labour.

As collaboration between these parts of the community was explored, it became clear that whilst operating in different spheres there is room for synergy. All three have the ability to advocate, bring the influence of their networks for the common good of the community and impart skills to community members. Business can help communities think about entrepreneurial and commercial sustainability, CD practitioners can bring development skills to help the whole community move forward and church can help facilitate these processes.

Open Space

The second part of the day allowed for participants to pitch a burning question or idea to the group in the hope that others would join for a conversation. Six topics were discussed in two sessions.

- How can there be a sense of belonging in a community when we are transient?
- When culture conflicts with the principles of shalom or community development
- How can churches, businesses and communities facilitate environmental and economic sustainability?
- How can Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) facilitate / enable flourishing communities?
- Money makes the world go round, what does that mean for community development?
- How do we value non-capital assets as we move towards a flourishing community?

- **How can there be a sense of belonging in a community when we are transient?**

The group recognised the need to build better relationships between renters / squatters and property owners; displaced people and those more established; vulnerable / marginalised people and resilient towns and villages. They also recognised that there were dormitory suburbs and people who are happily nomadic. Education, economics and housing were seen as key resources to helping people feel connected to the community. Education needs to remind people that everyone is equal, and economics and housing need to be thought of in a system.

In feeling connected to place a sense of belonging to people is critical. The group saw that in a community people are neighbours and are in relationship. Storytelling and discovering a common connection is helpful as is building projects together. This helps people to see others, and remember their legitimacy and that no one is less than anyone else. The group saw a nexus between education, jobs and housing.

- **When culture conflicts with the principles of shalom or community development**

The group addressed this question in terms of barriers and enablers from culture to the creation of shalom or community development.

Barriers included: Funerals and weddings paid for by loans which take a long time to pay back; the effect gender and age has on participation; the uncircumcised considered not mature to participate; legislation of marijuana and economic impact; prostitution legislation; LGBTIQ and inclusion; women and land ownership; language barriers; belief systems; white supremacy; witchcraft and black magic.

Enablers in culture included: ubuntu and volunteerism; connection to nature and wildlife; religious leaders and organisations; collective economics; traditional structures; people being hospitable

- **How can churches, businesses and communities facilitate environmental and economic sustainability?**

The group recognised that there is a tension between environmental and economic sustainability. It is like moving from Egypt to the promised land, there needs to be a life giving model. The world is in a transition phase from old carbon economies to the green economy. The green economy is reducing jobs, moving from labour intensive fields to digitisation. There needs to be subsidies and conversations around the role of work outside of finances. The group saw that there are opportunities in the solar industry as innovation replaces industry. They named some common problems such as unemployment, consumerist lifestyles, population growth and conflict. They recognised that children can be seen as a blessing from God to care for parents in their old age. This doesn't take into account the imbalance between people, growth and productivity. Churches, businesses and communities can each play a part in positively effecting these dynamics.

Churches: Theology must change from scarcity to abundance allowing for generosity like the 'Bible Project,' teach and live stewardship more than money; implement a theology of work; train people in theology as well as the quadruple bottom line; facilitate a conversation of value.

Business: Improve the labour markets; focus on trades; take a more balanced approach; measure benefits; have a long- term view; CSR

Communities: Change educational models to be more practical – trade; Sharing assets – Acts 2; if environment is abused today the affect will be felt tomorrow.

- **How can Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) facilitate / enable flourishing communities?**

Corporations have a vision statement, for example Bombardier's is 'Do no harm.' They need to be called to account if they are not aligned to their own values. CSR needs to engage with the local communities as stakeholders, even in the giving of money. Community members need to be on the boards of companies allowing relationships to build from the start and be

of benefit to the community. When there is corporate abuse, labour unions should respond. In Zambia there is a law to ensure that communities benefit, it's a resource sharing mechanism. In this way communities watch after the asset. When funds are set up some governments abuse them. Shops can become places of community engagement, getting local communities involved. This increases belonging and contribution. In communities there is a lack of childcare which hampers engagement (something about children taken). To enable more targeted CSR an Appreciative Inquiry of employees could be done. CSR can contribute to flourishing families. In South Africa a recent report recommended enforcing the CSR framework. Corporations can still have a colonial mentality though which hampers effective CSR.

- **Money makes the world go round, what does that mean for community development?**
Money can serve CD by being embedded in prayer, investing in people and structuring proper stewardship. The group believed there needed to be a focus on discipleship and a strong relational approach. Money could also help if people had to meet CD requirements to get the investment in their community. There can be a challenge around investing into the same pond. In all things there needs to be transparency and accountability. A question was raised, is money the starting point or the outcome? One response was to use what you have and start work now. As well as being trustworthy with the little. Practically, as projects start, there needs to be awareness raising and common strategizing. This way money can follow development rather than driving it. Community needs to have a paradigm shift towards a business mindset and also from receiving to giving. Overall, God sees people as capable.
- **How do we value 'non-capital' assets as we move towards a flourishing community?**
(no notes)

Day 2: Strengthening Communities

The group explored how the nine principles of Asset (strength) Based Community Development relate to the nexus between business and community. The principles explored were;

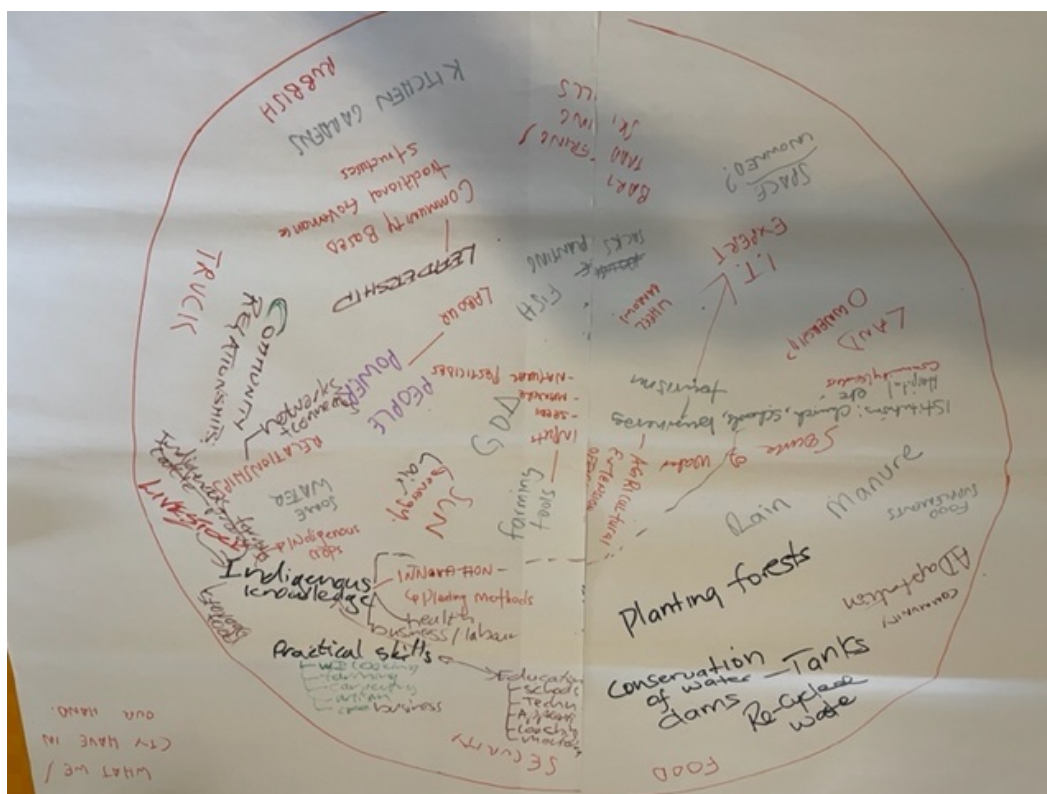
- everyone has gifts
- relationships build a community
- community at the centre
- leaders involve others
- people care,
- listen
- ask
- community as the central influencers
- business / NGOs to serve the community

We visited Kibera, Africa's largest informal settlement. We visited a vocational education college run by (Africa Inland Child Centred Community Development (AICCCD). Amongst other things the college teaches catering, fashion and beauty. We visited the work of Centre for Urban Mission. They are in the process of developing a new community centre in Kibera which will have a range of functions from being a small hospital to having smart meeting rooms and community space. Both projects are working to empower the community towards a brighter future. Those on the visit were amazed to see the innovation, industry and resilience of the Kibera community.

The conference explored a process for mapping intractable issues in local communities: Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS). The purpose of the exercise was to show the interconnected nature of communities and how simple cause and effect thinking can create unintended negative consequences.

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From the mapping of the factors and looking to the strengths of the community, a systemic change link can be created. In this case:

Climate change - water scarcity – conflict – colonisation – urbanisation and modernisation – access to land – injustice (water usage) – access to markets.

Each of these elements are connected and as interventions are designed with all of these factors in mind, they will create a ripple effect across the whole system. This exercise was done over a couple of hours; it would normally last at least a day to design more detailed plans.

The last session of the conference focused on the future of Create. Reflection questions included:

- How have the conversations across the conference been helpful to you?
- We have been talking about the Create Movement this week – why is starting such a movement important?
- What would the Create Movement do?
- How can you contribute to the Create Movement?

Attendees at the conference found the conversations helpful as they focused on

- New frameworks, tools and contacts
- How business and community complement each other
- A better understanding of how church, NGO, business and community can come together for flourishing communities
- A zooming out and were not immediately solution focused
- Helping people gain a different understanding of the CD approach
- Experiencing various methods and created space to gain a better understanding of the role of business

- A paradigm shift within community development
- Gaining an understanding of where everyone was coming from

Attendees saw that it is important for the conference to evolve into a movement:

- To continue the new creation that God is doing
- To connect the body of Christ together to share resources and skills
- The world is moving towards movements
- Advocacy, fundraising, catalysing various ministries
- Allowing for the creativity needed for a flourishing future
- Will enable grassroot communities
- Disruption to the norm
- Inspiring church leaders
- The strategies of development are unique
- Vehicle for cross sector / cross globe collaborative partnerships

The potential functions of the movement were then explored:

- Training, process creation, story collecting and gatherings
- Facilitation
- Sharing resources and connecting
- Advocacy
- Build a friendly structure for future work coordination
- Provide space for Christian innovators
- Build a collaborative advantage – linkages, church, business and CD
- Provide space for business, CD and multi-faith to be drawn together
- Create centres of hope across the world especially in depressed parts (Centre of Hope for Business, Church and Community Development)
- Create a theology of change
- Begin a think tank (business, development and theology)
- Train faith leaders and traditional leaders for sustainable development
- Link to other movements and networks
- Shape and change donor mentality from negative to positive
- Influence our institutions to connect business, development and theology

People at the conference saw they could contribute through:

- Providing theological and contextual knowledge and skills
- Furthering the movement in Pakistan
- Creating models of CD
- Sharing the vision with others and being an active participant
- Sharing practical stories
- Bringing gender balance
- Creating business models
- Bringing in more business connections
- Experimenting with ideas and frameworks
- Offering financial vehicles
- Multifaith connections

- Encouraging stewardship, generosity and giving
- Conducting Participatory Action Research
- Mobilising local and regional voices
- A business mindset
- Approaches, resources, thinking, connections, writings around church, community and business
- Offering skills and commitment to CD
- Helping with structure
- Networks and inviting others from around the world to join the conversation
- Leadership, vision, training
- Bringing expertise to the table

The conference ended with a commissioning prayer

I commission you to be an invitation,
 inviting people into your messy homes, lives and hearts.
 I pray that when you are tired, broken and bored
 that the God of comfort would give you the strength
 to be a safe harbor, to anchor the weight of injustice.

I commission you to live a life that leaves a mark,
 marking your community with prayer, service and generosity.
 I pray that the God of hope would give you the eyes
 to see the brokenness around you,
 and the tools to become an agent of change.

I commission you to be a beacon of hope,
 for those whose lives have been devastated by
 violence, suffering and loss.
 I pray that the God of healing will use
 your sacrifice to restore his Kingdom.

I commission you into transformational living,
 where your actions, words, and deeds are intentional,
 where acts of kindness, words of hope and
 strategic ministry become habitual.
 I pray that the God of power will gift you
 with supernatural wisdom and abilities
 so that you can walk in faith,
 into any situation fully equipped.

I commission you to be a bridge,
 bridging the gap between race,
 gender, age and religion.
 I pray that the God of all creation
 will give you the knowledge and understanding
 to become a person of reconciliation,
 binding the wounds of hatred and greed.

I call you to Joy, in the midst of suffering.

I call you to Hope, in the face of brutality.
I call you to Faith, in the valley of death.
I call you to Love, in the name of Jesus.