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Editor's note

In this issue of *SHARE*, we share about rural development work. The issue's 'Focus' explores rural development centred on relationships, emphasising the interaction with nature, land, and interpersonal networks. 'Back to the Bible' reflects on the teachings of selflessness, drawn from agricultural-related scriptures in Leviticus. 'Blessings by Offering' features CEDAR's projects in Nepal, bearing witness to how rural poor communities are transformed through capacity building and community empowerment. Additionally, in 'Learn a Little More', our colleague Dustin shares his ten-year service journey at CEDAR.

FOCUS

Rural Development Model: 'Relationship, Relationship, Relationship'

Written by Winnie Fung (Chief Executive)

If you ask a real estate agent the three most important factors for buying a house and determining its value, the answer will

be 'location, location, location.' If you ask a development worker the three most important factors for rural development, the answer will be 'relationship, relationship, relationship.'

When doing rural development, everything is about relationship. There is deep interdependence with nature and climate, significant identity ties to the land, and a necessary reliance on informal networks.

Interdependence with Nature

Most rural communities rely on farming, animal husbandry, and/or fishing for livelihoods. What the land produces is what they can consume. As a result, soil, water, and natural resource management is a 'must-do' and a non-negotiable part of development work. Sanitation (e.g. waste management) and pollution control are also high on the priority list.

The interdependence with nature means that rural communities are more susceptible to vulnerabilities and risks due to climate change. To take one example, one of CEDAR's partners, Thai-Lahu Foundation (TLF), serves the Lahu hill tribes who live in northern Thailand. They are primarily subsistence farmers, growing rice for self-consumption and a small amount of corn as cash crop.

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The Lahu farmers wrestle with the problems of soil erosion, soil depletion, heat waves, and drought. The situation is made worse by climate change, as extreme weather events and abnormal rainfall lead to sharp reduction in crop yields and crop failure. The result is hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity.

CEDAR and TLF may not be able to reverse the impact of climate change for these farmers, but we can help them build resilience and prevent or alleviate some of the negative impacts. One way is to promote the use of local varieties of seeds and seedlings rather than using imported seeds. The local varieties are more resilient and adaptive to local land and climate conditions, and we encourage farmers to take pride and have confidence in what their land has already provided them rather than believing that 'foreign seeds must be better than our own'. We also encourage families to plant and use local herbs for medicinal purposes and as part of their diet.

Another way is to promote backyard gardening (growing vegetables on a small plot of land) and multilayer farming (growing multiple crops in a single field by planting one crop on top of another already existing crop). The purpose is to save space and improve efficiency. Some of the farmers were used to planting a single crop (usually rice), so to do otherwise, they needed to be convinced. Our partner brings the Lahu farmers to special demonstration plots so that they may see for themselves what multilayer farming can look like. The farmers always come back with excited and sparkling eyes because they can see what the possibilities are.



CEDAR's project encourages and trains farmers in Northern Thailand to grow vegetables in their backyards.

This is what CEDAR and our overseas partners try to do: 'to engage, empower, and enlarge.' We engage the farmers where they are so they can appreciate and make good use of their own resources, be it local seeds or local knowledge of different kinds of herbs. We empower families as a unit, so the wives, and not just the husbands, are invited to attend agricultural training and workshops. In their contexts, ultimately, it is the women who do the farming and not the men. We also enlarge their social network and their imagination so that they can have access to more ideas for improving their livelihoods and can get a taste of what is possible.

Identity Ties to the Land

The interdependence with nature leads to a strong identification with the land. For rural communities, where one was born and where one's parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were born all form part of one's core identity. The land, or land rights, is a crucial issue in rural development.

Land rights are more than just about economics. Of course, being able to demonstrate ownership and derive economic

value from one's land is significant to those who are poor. But more importantly, the absence or violation of land rights, internal displacement due to conflicts, or forced migration from one's homeland can do lasting harm to one's sense of security, identity, and community.

I was visiting a remote village in the Mekong region. Instead of living in the hills like the Lahu hill tribes, this community lives in the lowlands. The local government has given this village an eviction order. To increase revenue and bring in economic activities, the government wants to claim land to build a casino, and in order to claim land, a dam has to be built. However, the result of the dam project is that the village will be completely flooded and submerged underwater.

The government has given the villagers a deadline to leave their homes and move to a higher altitude, yet there are no farmlands at that altitude, just a wasteland. This means the villagers have to start everything from scratch: finding materials and building a house, tilling the land, and slowly starting to farm.

I talked with a 70-year-old lady whom I call Grandma Fong. She used to be a teacher but now owns a mom-and-pop store selling soft drinks and snacks. Her storefront is basically the living room of her house. She regards her house fondly, as it was built by her late husband almost 50 years ago, and they had a lot of sweet memories there. When talking about the government's eviction order, she said she simply does not know what to do. She has a small plot of land about a 15-minute walk away, and that land will be submerged underwater soon. There is nothing she can take with her except for a few wooden planks that form the ceiling of her house and that the government allows villagers to take with them.

Significance of Informal Networks: to Engage, Empower, and Enlarge

Next to Grandma Fong's village is another village known to the locals as a Christian village. CEDAR's project consultant works with a local pastor there who has a passion for community development and church mobilisation. Since the Christian village is located at a higher altitude, they are not included in the eviction order, but they see the plight of their non-Christian neighbours and want to help in whatever way they can.

They do not have material goods to offer as they themselves are poor, but they offer their time and labour. They form informal networks to identify and help those in need, e.g. Grandma Fong and others who are too old or weak to move by themselves. They do not know Grandma Fong beforehand, but they demonstrate a concrete act of love.

The Christian leaders in the village are also concerned about the youths, as most of them are unemployed and will likely end up working in the casino once it is built. The Mekong region is infamous for drug trafficking and human trafficking, and the fear is that the youths will be drawn into the drug trade or fall victim to trafficking.

Our partner seeks to engage and empower the youth by starting a garbage management project. With CEDAR's support, they built a small incinerator near an oft-frequented road in the village and taught the youth to collect and sort garbage. Some of the garbage can be recycled and sold by the youth to obtain a small income, while some can be burnt in the incinerator in an environmentally sustainable way. The project was so successful that local government officials noticed the cleanliness of the village and reached out to ask the youths to replicate their efforts in nearby villages.

However, the success of such projects is never about the building of the physical infrastructure, in this case, the



CEDAR staff inspected the small incinerator established in the garbage management project.

incinerator. Instead, the success lies in the relationship and trust that the pastor, the local church, and the development worker have formed with the village community. The key to garbage management is not the knowledge or skills but the trust and willingness to adopt behavioural change and the ability to spread such behavioural change through informal networks. One needs the buy-in of the community to manage and maintain such development projects, whether it is garbage waste or water management.

Ultimately, rural development is not about models or projects or skills, but about recognising and honouring relationships, whether with nature or with one another.

Back to the Bible

Selflessness for the Common Good

Written by Janice Cheng (Pastor)

Scriptures reading: Leviticus 19:9-10

In an agrarian society, land is a very important asset; it not only provides food for the landowner but also helps accumulate wealth. However, those without land must rely solely on their labour to obtain food, living from hand to mouth. The Israelites, who were once slaves and sojourners in Egypt, would understand the plight of the landless foreigners and the poor.

Leviticus 19:9-10 (also see Deuteronomy 24:19-22) instructs God's people not to reap the corners of their fields or gather the fallen produce and not to harvest the grapes a second time, so that the poor may also share in the land's bounty. Although the land is owned by the landowner, the true owner of all land is the Creator of Heaven and Earth. A god-fearing landowner understands that their role is merely to manage the land on behalf of God and is, therefore, willing to share the right to use the land.

Hong Kong, which has transformed from an industrial port into a financial hub in Asia since the 1970s, has seen its lower classes benefit from widespread education and church welfare programmes, lifting many out of poverty. Many who grew up during this period have become influential figures in the economy, moving from lower socio-economic statuses to having asset advantages in society today. However, how many are genuinely willing to share the benefits of their assets with others?

Before the Israelites entered Canaan, God had commanded Moses to teach the Israelites all the commandments about loving their neighbours so that this chosen nation would reflect God's holiness. Leviticus shows us that sharing resources with others is not an act of

charity but a social responsibility that asset owners should fulfil. For Christians, sharing with others is based on the principle of fearing God—He is the Lord of both the rich and the poor. When those who fear the Lord follow the teachings of the Bible, the world can see that He does not show favouritism because the Lord blesses both the resource owners and those who are lacking in society through them. By allowing the poor to glean the fields, they can sustain themselves with dignity, and this method of sharing by resource owners reflects a respectful attitude towards the poor, which is closer to God's intention than mere charity.

Blessings by Offering

Life Transformation of Villagers in Poverty

Written by Clara Chiu (Head of Partnership Development)

According to the United Nations, 'poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making.' It turns out that poverty is not just the 'lack of money', but also 'lacking' in many other aspects: income, resources, power, opportunity and respect.

Let us share a project in Nepal which witnesses how CEDAR transformed poor communities who face multiple 'lacks'.

Since 2017, CEDAR has partnered with the local organisation Share and Care Nepal (SCN) to carry out a project called 'Project Hope' in Makwanpur District, adopting a comprehensive community transformation approach: enhancing villagers' capabilities and empowering communities, developing livelihood projects, promoting gender equality, empowering women, youth and children.

Over the years, we have been walking alongside these villagers to understand their needs; we encouraged them to form self-help groups, learning and sharing their life experiences, making savings; we have taught them skills in farming and keeping livestock to diversify their productions, thus stabilising their income. We have educated them about individual rights and gender equality, allowing them to understand their own rights; we also encouraged the women to participate in decision-making on village affairs and build the community alongside regional leaders. Thanks be to the Lord! The overall living standard of these villagers has improved. Earlier, we invited a third-party evaluator to conduct an external review of this project, and its report revealed gratifying results (following is a summary of two findings):

The beneficiary families profited from breeding poultry and diversified into other livestock and crops; food supply, diet types and income levels have all improved. - Tallo Pakani is a woman who received livelihood assistance. With help from the self-help group's income-generating activities, she made some profits by keeping chickens; with that, she bought three goats, and their number increased to five after six months. Later, she became seriously ill while giving birth and had to go to Kathmandu for medical treatment immediately. Fortunately, her family could sell the goats so that she could pay for the treatment. After recovery, she continued to keep goats. She shared, 'Because of that support I got treatment. Otherwise, we did not have spent any money to save my life.'

The youth and girls groups published quarterly reports, they

organised extracurricular activities in schools and public places to fight against human trafficking, child marriage and domestic violence, raising the villagers' awareness of human trafficking and gender-based violence. - BarDanda, the in-charge of Police Post, shared, 'I am well informed that the women groups are actively involved in awareness raising against gender-based violence, early marriage and also polygamy. The police post is interested to conduct orientation/ training to raise awareness against such issue, if the WAGs (women action groups) contact us.'

Project Hope has reached its goals, they have not only made up for the villagers' insufficiencies but also empowered them to become self-reliant. Therefore, with a thanksgiving heart, the staff members of CEDAR have decided to joyfully end our partnership with SCN. We aim to put our resources into other villages, allowing more villagers to experience the joy of their lives being transformed.



The woman beneficiary of the project received funds to purchase a small goat for her livelihood and is showing great joy.

including myself had a severe shortage of masks, so I initially doubted how effective this campaign could become. As time passed, however, many supporters of CEDAR and local citizens donated thousands of masks. This reminded me that I must have faith in the Lord, for His power is beyond what I can fathom.

During the ten years that I have been in CEDAR, I have experienced illness and death in my family. My coworkers were very concerned, and they prayed for my family and me. In addition, He (God) reminded me that besides caring for my coworkers and the poor community, I should also care about our supporters. We have sent condolence cards to the families of our deceased supporters and prayed for them. It turns out that our relationship can go beyond 'supporters' and 'recipient organisation', we have become neighbours and families.

I hope the concern of CEDAR for its supporters, as well as its care for the communities in poverty would remain the same; I hope more people will get to know about CEDAR through our sharing and articles, and they would support the communities living in poverty in the long run.



The author participates in an outreach educational activity to promote poverty alleviation.

Learn a Little More

Ten Years of Graceful Service

Written by Dustin Tang (Donor Services Officer)

As of September 2024, I have served in CEDAR Fund for ten years. Looking back, apart from changes in roles and tasks, God's grace has always been with me.

Ten years ago, I was introduced to CEDAR by a sister from my church. Initially, I participated as a volunteer and took part in administrative support work, such as contacting and inviting churches to participate in our activities, inputting participant information, preparing event materials, etc. Later, I became a part-time staff member and transitioned to a full-time role. My role and work have changed from being 'behind the scenes' to being 'in front of the scenes', sharing and leading experiential activities in churches and schools. I am grateful that every time I share, I find guidance from the Lord, giving me the confidence and courage to complete the task.

However, His grace is certainly not limited to this! Serving in CEDAR not only enhanced my understanding of poverty issues, such as human trafficking, peace and reconciliation, refugees etc; but also strengthened my faith in the Lord. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in early 2020, CEDAR launched 'Love in the Time of COVID-19', a mask donation campaign that called on citizens to donate masks and pandemic prevention items. These items were then distributed to groups in need by Christians Concern for the Homeless Association. At that time, most local citizens,

2024/2025 Operating Statements

In the period of Jul - Aug 2024

Income	HK\$	3,442,907
Donations		2,826,946
Appeal for Relief		351,301
Other Income		264,660

Expenditure	HK\$	2,914,324
Development Projects		2,060,396
Disaster Relief Projects		128,840
Partnership Development		559,506
Administration		165,582

Account profit and loss / (Deficit) HK\$ 528,583

Note: CEDAR's fiscal year is from 1st July to 30th June of the following year. The total budgeted expenditure for the fiscal year 2024 to 2025 is HK\$21,943,077. Please pray for and support CEDAR and its partners in their ministry.

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