






Overview

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The pith of this book is interventions to collaboratively better the lives of low-income households with their development on a local scale. These interventions are co-created with communities by a not-for-profit company based in South Africa. Successful interventions to provide more efficient and less polluting energy, treatment of waste, and sanitation are discussed here. Access to water is also discussed. They all contribute to planetary well-being in their small way. These are not the only developmental topics: early childhood development (ECD), artificial intelligence (AI), policymaking, urban planning, intervention models, and research tools are also on the table.

The book is scholarly and practical. It takes scientific literature in several fields as well as situations on the ground in South Africa into account. The 29 contributing authors (including the editors) comprise scientific researchers at universities, full-time research consultants, fieldworkers, and philosophers. Seven universities are represented.

The context is as wide as they come: from heaven above (Chapter 2) to geological epochs below (the Anthropocene as discussed in Chapter 1), from global trends such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Chapter 8) to intimate autoethnographic personal histories (Chapters 13 and 14) as well

as Philosophy, Economics and Chemistry. Chemistry comes in, for example, when we deal with standards for ambient air in various contexts.

The main message of this book should be that the context may be as important as the intervention. That makes the task tough, as alluded to in the book's title. Sure enough, the context comprises the physical (even global) and socio-political environment (including government policy). But when an intervention is planned, the practical context also entails being present in communities, thorough interaction, research, conceptual labour, and careful preparation. To make this concrete: the best stove to provide for cooking and heating in an informal settlement depends not only on the stove but on the family who will benefit from it, the house in which it is to be installed (see Chapters 4, 9, and 12), plus its emissions and other factors. In Chapter 6, it is reported that a successful sanitation project must dig deeper than the toilet and sewerage system, but also pay attention to factors such as fear of sorcery and the cultural meaning of discarded clothes. Therefore, the task is tough because successful interventions comprise more than just a quick consultation to tick a box and install a device. Chapter 6 argues for an understanding of the lifeworld of the community in which one is involved. Chapter 9 warns against a facile treatment of consultation.

So, the successful interventions described in this book can be compared to the tip of an iceberg or the visible trunk of a tree above the ground.

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The first two chapters fall under the heading *Philosophical Considerations*. However, philosophy is decidedly present in other chapters, such as Chapters 6 and 14. Chapter 6, which deals with empirical research about sanitation in urban and rural settings, has a strong philosophical component from the phenomenological tradition. Chapter 14 exhibits the critical attitude that characterises the philosopher.

Concern for the poor under the banner of *development* is never disinterested ideologically. For example, some might want

poverty eradicated to create more consumers of their products. In this book, however, the Christian faith and philosophy, and ethics in general, are undeniably present (see Chapters 2, 11, 13, 14, and 15) without compromising scholarly standards. Here the reader will find a concern for the future of life on Earth. There is a passion for the well-being of those who can barely meet their daily needs. The concluding sentence of the book is a plea for taking personal responsibility.

The second part of the book is devoted to discussions of various *Specific Interventions* in which a specific organisation, namely Nova Institute, was involved, along with the lessons learned. Several cases of specific hard-to-achieve or tough organisational interventions in the fields of clean air and health (Chapter 3), clean energy (Chapter 4), waste (Chapter 5), sanitation (Chapter 6), and early childhood education (Chapter 7) are presented as case studies. But in a sense, the whole book is a case study of a self-financed, independent organisation that works with households and other stakeholders at bettering the lives of low-income communities. It discusses practical examples of ground-level projects and developmental instruments, which are worth studying by similar-sized institutes, but also by large publicly funded bodies in the field of development. We hope to count them as readers of this book. Some challenges are similar regardless of whether the public interest body is large or small. In a project, for example, helping a community living in informal housing in an informal settlement to adopt a new way of meeting their needs for heating and cooking (see Chapter 4), science, statistics, economics, literacy, activism, town planning, and technology must work together. Nova's interventions flow from meticulous multidisciplinary research. This is a tough task. A special kind of consultant or consultancy body is needed. So, in discussing Nova's *modi operandi* (planning and managing interventions) and the deep thinking behind it, the book is also a contribution to Development Theory. In several chapters, the debt that authors owe to the Chilean economist and sociologist Manfred Max-Neef is apparent.

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The real and often unhealthy and dirty environment in which low-income communities live looms large. An important aspect of the book is the concern for the environment, locally and globally, without becoming merely fashionable. The entire Earth is a big concern. However, the authors avoid trendiness. They value critical thinking, conceptual excellence, and methodological innovation (see Chapter 12).

In addition to specific interventions, the third part of the book is dedicated to *Transversal Issues* that typically feature in development work in a country such as South Africa. The best way to work with a community amidst the tension between consultation and collaboration is discussed in Chapter 9. True support of low-income families will flourish only if policy can be influenced, which raises the question of whether policy is informed by scientific evidence in South Africa. This is discussed in Chapter 10. The well-being of poor communities cannot come to the fore unless there are equitable service provision and spatial justice. This is the subject of Chapter 11. The burning issue of how much low-income households can benefit from the 4IR is discussed in Chapter 8.

Part 4 comprises two *Autoethnographic Chapters* (Chapters 13 and 14), where the reader meets two of the Nova directors in their cultural settings. Strong views highlight the complexities that we are faced with.

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Each chapter stands on its own. The authors are the authors in the full sense of the word. The careful reader will be able to discern a general trend in the book, but also observe differences between the views of the authors as is normal in scholarship. The editors provided footnotes to help the reader cross-reference information.

Chapter 1 introduces the overall vision of planetary well-being as signalled in the title of the book, *Development in the Anthropocene – The tough task of working towards planetary well-being with low-income households*. Montagu Murray argues in a philosophical vein that our evolving understanding of the implications of living in the time of the Anthropocene

calls for Planetary Well-being Goals that build upon, but can also improve, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN). The chapter shows that the idea of sustainable development must be reconsidered. The current epoch requires new thinking leading to a qualitatively and not only quantitatively better life and planetary well-being within an integrated system of humans and nature. The choice of *planetary well-being* instead of *sustainable development* is important for understanding the aim of the book. Montagu Murray introduces the ideas of the Australian public intellectual and thinker Clive Hamilton that feature prominently in the next chapter. The climax of the chapter is the identification of the Planetary Well-being Goals. Murray writes that planetary well-being goals (PWGs) can include many of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). “What must be asked in the case of each goal, target, and indicator, is not if it contributes to sustainable development, but if it contributes to planetary well-being”.

Chapter 2 plays out at the intersection between Philosophy and Theology. Sytse Strijbos works towards his message by using two contrasts: the contrast between modernity and faith, and the contrast between climate alarmism (Hamilton) and eco-modernism (Allenby). The key point of the analysis is that these parties are inescapably caught in a conflict that cannot hope for a resolution. This is because they are rooted in modernity (arguably initiated by the English philosopher Francis Bacon [1561–1626]). Modernity disconnects the Earth from its relationship with Heaven and the Creator of Heaven and Earth. This chapter forces the reader to consider their position on the relationship between faith and technology.

Unlike much of the literature, Chapter 3, written by Christiaan Pauw and his co-authors, contextualises actions to decrease air pollution right inside the low-income home. The chapter provides a substantial exposition of the most important technical and intervention-related aspects that everyone interested in mitigating air pollution with public health in mind should understand. It is an ideal exposition for students as well

as officials who need to know the basics regarding clean air as a developmental and health issue.

The important Chapter 4, written by Kristy Langerman and her co-authors, links with the previous chapter in that we are still, such as it were, inside the low-income home. Energy needs are on the agenda. A major contribution of the chapter is insights into intervention design. Important lessons to be gained from the way in which Nova plans interventions come to the fore in the cases discussed, as improving on interventions that are plagued by low adoption rates and households abandoning them after a short period of use. Nova's model is called the 'rational life cycle approach'. The various stages in such interventions are explained. The authors conclude, amongst others, that sustainability needs to be understood from the recipients' perspective as improving a household's ability to sustainably actualise their domestic energy needs.

In Chapter 5, Catherina Schenck, Antionette van der Merwe and Pierre Reyneke report on successful pilot projects in several provinces helping low-income families cope with waste handling where public waste removal services fail. The authors situate the need for waste handling within the situation of the planet as well as a progressive view of the economy. The idea is that a linear economy, where all production leads to waste, should be replaced with an economy that is circular and recycling. This is another example of where a Nova intervention is built upon thorough research and where those involved in applying the intervention are learning in the process.

Chapter 6 is based on both empirical research and philosophical understanding. Attie van Niekerk, Betsie le Roux, and Antionette van der Merwe apply the concepts of *lifeworld*, *sense of place* and *consciousness* to better understand the relationship between people, their environment, and the technologies (in this case sanitation) that they use. They present two case studies to illustrate how such philosophical theories can be applied. There is another aspect of this chapter that typifies this book and the way in which Nova works. The project was aimed at developing systems to improve the

situation in African communities, so African ways of thinking must be respected.

The family is central to the development. Chapter 7, written by Nicolette Roman, Catherine Senyolo and Antionette van der Merwe, is a case study of a project that differs from the other cases that the reader encounters in the book. This time it does not pertain to the physical environment, but to the social environment in the home, school, and church. The family is central to development in the Anthropocene. The case deals with early childhood development and the optimal way of organising interventions with this aim together with communities and their churches. This curriculum's core strengths are parental agency, the collaboration between the family and the early childhood development (ECD) centre, and whole-child development. Read between the lines and you will see that the project discussed here did not always run smoothly. Again, there is much to be learned from hitches.

Chapter 8 by Christiaan Pauw is a sober but optimistic exploration of the contribution the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) can make to bettering the lives of low-income families. Nova identified 25 elements that facilitate the actualisation of fundamental human needs in the context of the household as a complex system. This instrument is used on which to hang the investigation. In general, the fruits of the 4IR benefited well-off families more than low-income families. However, in the field of learning, opportunities do exist for low-income families to benefit from this industrial revolution. Pauw also considers the economic and political implications of 4IR and concludes that it is too early to say how this will turn out in this context.

Chapter 9 is a provocative picture of the inadequacy of half-baked consultation in the context of so-called wicked problems. Niké Wesch, Selna Cornelius and Jako Viviers set out a well-known hierarchy of consultation. This forms the background of a comparison between two cases using a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, intending to compare the SWOT posed by varying

levels of public participation. The research contributes insights to the discourse on effective decision-making strategies and empowering communities through participatory engagement. As in other chapters, a project installing semi-continuous stoves in low-income households is in the offing.

The long Chapter 10 deals with a deceptively simple question of whether environmental policy in South Africa is evidence-based. In an articulated case study, the four authors deal with four aspects of this question: First, evidence-based policy theory, and then the respective policies for air quality (also see Chapters 3 and 4), waste (also see Chapter 5), and water. After conducting conceptual work on the definitions of policy and evidence, they investigate what happened in South Africa in the 21st century in these three fields. They conclude that the role of evidence in this area of policymaking depends on the historical context and the level of physical detail involved. For example, when standards for ambient air quality are to be determined, scientific evidence plays a bigger role than when a white paper is written.

Chapter 11, written by Caroline Newton and her co-authors, emphasises the existence of inequalities and poses the question of how deteriorating services contribute to social injustice, specifically spatial injustice. This chapter shares a concern for policy with the previous one. A theoretical scene-setting is followed by analyses of information gathered from Nova's work in two townships. This is augmented by a study of policies. The findings reveal significant inequities in access to services, highlighting challenges in access to water, electricity, waste disposal, and housing. Spatial justice and service rendering must be seen against demographics and South Africa's past.

Chapter 12 by Valerie Møller and Montagu Murray is a contribution to Quality-of-Life studies and the Social Indicator Movement (SIM). It also provides a picture of interventions in practice. It is a chapter rich in ideas and information. Readers are, for example, given the opportunity to become *au fait* once more with the working of stoves providing energy to low-income

households. The authors discuss, amongst others, instruments developed by Nova and applied with great success in its projects. The Nova Institute follows an intervention life cycle approach in intervention development that requires assessing the feasibility of interventions or intervention combinations before proceeding to larger-scale implementation, as also explicated in Chapter 4. This chapter scrutinises the process and results followed in feasibility assessments of interventions in two townships aimed at replacing or reducing wood use, the burning of domestic waste, and the use of paraffin. The feasibility assessments are conducted with a novel tool that Nova developed, the *Particular impact on quality-of-life assessment* (Piqola) tool. The instrument is also featured in Chapters 4 and 9.

Chapters 13 and 14 present personal stories of people in whose lives Nova plays an important role – Luc Kabongo and Christiaan Pauw. They are both directors of Nova. As they tell their stories, they also cast light on broader societal and even political issues – hence the concept of autoethnography. Luc Kabongo is a missionary who chose to live with those to whom he aims to proclaim the gospel in a very practical sense by helping them to change their material lives for the better. This is the spirit that he shares with Nova. Christiaan Pauw also has a faith background and has a passion for making people's lives better. Still, he is allergic to the hegemonic way in which certain ideas seem to dominate environmentalism. This resulted in a certain scepticism of leading ideas and idols. He describes his road to hesitancy regarding aspects of the environmentalist grand narrative.

Chapter 15, written by the editors, draws the most important strings together. They show that the book gives substance to the aphorism *Think Globally, Act Locally*. Under the rubric of *Think Globally*, they pay attention to the first word in our title, "Development". A proper conclusion to the book requires an explication of the concept with emphasis on how the concept is advanced in our analyses. In this, the care for and integrity of the global environment is essential and carries implications for the integrity of well-meaning agents who understand their place in creation. Under the *Act Locally* part, some of Nova's

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interventions working together with low-income families and other stakeholders, are recounted. This is a tough task requiring technology: both physical and process technology. The editors also mention how science supports the interventions and the importance of collaboration with communities.