

VILLAGE SELF RELIANCE – A NEW DEVELOPMENT MODEL

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Due to the failure of previous attempts at economic development over the past half century, Sub-Saharan Africa has become completely unable to compete in the global economy, save for a few sectors of primary production. Even a rudimentary economic analysis quickly reveals that to equalize the levels of worker productivity between Sub-Saharan Africa and the global North to a point at which trade would be mutually beneficial would require trillions of dollars of direct investment.

As an alternative to such an impossible scenario, Working Villages International is putting forth an economic development model called the Village Self Reliance created by WVI's founder Alexander Petroff. Village Self Reliance is based on Mahatma Gandhi's idea of swadeshi or localized economics. It favors restructuring local markets towards self-reliance, and injecting start-up capital, expertise, and vocational training, in order to shift dependency away from foreign imports, while at the same time strengthening the local economy. In this model, market incentives are changed in order to orient local production towards fulfilling local demand for food, clothing, housing materials, and manufactured commodities.

To meet the challenges presented by low worker productivity and the rising cost of oil, WVI introduces a post-petroleum village economy that is energy self-sufficient. The village will rely on ox power instead of trucks, tractors and automobiles. Locally produced biogas will take the place of electricity and charcoal. This methodology will allow village firms to drastically reduce capital outlay and foreign debt, while at the same time minimizing environmental impact and providing them with a competitive advantage against firms not operating within WVI's village economy.

In order to achieve these goals, this program deliberately sets aside electric and petroleum-based production methods and replaces them with a vigorous application of appropriate technology. WVI has already demonstrated that this leads to a noticeable increase in worker productivity in numerous sectors of village production. In addition, the shift to appropriate technology will create numerous forward and backward linkages within the local economy. Also, it will open up new opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

With this shift in the orientation of production in the economy, local firms will be able to trade freely within the village marketplace. However, due to the lack of control over long-distance commercial capital, the Village Self Reliance model addresses the dangers of local villagers being taken advantage of by unequal foreign trade by building a local cooperative trading structure for managing imports of village necessities and exports of village surpluses. It is WVI's conviction that this is the ideal method to protect local firms while simultaneously securing the maximum benefit for villagers.

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