



# Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approaches Fail

*Paul Polak*

Download now

Read Online 

# Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approaches Fail

*Paul Polak*

## **Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approaches Fail** Paul Polak

Based on his 25 years of experience, Polak explodes what he calls the "Three Great Poverty Eradication Myths": that we can donate people out of poverty, that national economic growth will end poverty, and that Big Business, operating as it does now, will end poverty. Polak shows that programs based on these ideas have utterly failed--in fact, in sub-Saharan Africa poverty rates have actually gone up. These failed top-down efforts contrast sharply with the grassroots approach Polak and IDE have championed: helping the dollar-a-day poor earn more money through their own efforts. Amazingly enough, unexploited market opportunities do exist for the desperately poor. Polak describes how he and others have identified these opportunities and have developed innovative, low-cost tools that have helped in lifting 17 million people out of poverty.

## **Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approaches Fail Details**

Date : Published February 1st 2008 by Berrett-Koehler Publishers (first published January 1st 2008)

ISBN : 9781576754498

Author : Paul Polak

Format : Hardcover 232 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Economics, Social Issues, Poverty, Cultural, Africa, International Rel..., International Development

 [Download Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approaches ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approache ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approaches Fail**  
**Paul Polak**

---

## **From Reader Review Out of Poverty: What Works When Traditional Approaches Fail for online ebook**

### **Mitchell says**

This book focuses on one very specific idea, which is that rural people living on less than a dollar a day should use low-cost drip irrigation to grow labor intensive produce out of season. According to Polak, if we can just help them get started with that, all the problems associated with poverty will solve themselves.

---

### **Robin says**

Based on writing ability alone, this book would rate three stars, maybe two and 1/2. It's difficult to get through at times because of how many, many times Polak repeats himself. Sure, perhaps he is really trying to drive a point home - but perhaps he should take for granted that he drove that point home when he mentioned it 5 times ago and he can now mention something without re-iterating every detail.

That aside, this book is very informative, compelling, and provides some definitely controversial (to some) opinions that are certainly worth considering.

---

### **Christy Horton says**

Lots of great ideas in this book. I would recommend knowing a bit about farming before reading. I did not and some of the ideas were lost on me.

---

### **Cori says**

Paul Polak is brilliant. His philosophy is simple about how to help most of the world out of poverty - and proven. He's helped 17 million people move out of extreme poverty with his ideas and intervention. That's ONE man. He's like Norman Borlaug - one of the most effective humanitarians in modern time and yet almost completely unknown. The world will ultimately be saved by people with great ideas, effectively applied. Paul Polak is one of those people.

---

### **Nathaniel says**

“Out of Poverty” is a workshop; it’s an evangelical seminar and an infomercial. It’s subdivided ruthlessly. It’s full of lists. It’s incredibly repetitive. There is absolutely no way to read it at an academic remove because Paul Polak is beating his readers over the head with the urgent simplicity of his thinking and with the exasperation of a pragmatist who is regularly accused of idealism.

Polak wants to encourage a modest paradigm shift in development. He’s convinced that donations will not alleviate poverty; that a country’s economic growth will not necessarily help the poor and that big businesses

cannot be trusted to do so either. He champions design for the other 90%--the increasingly popular effort to engineer products for the billions of people making do with about \$1 a day. And he is a powerful advocate of small-scale thinking: the one-acre farm is great: grow pumpkins on your roof and a raspberry patch! He wants to create wafer thin profit margins; but to spread those margins across a billion people. Why not?

Polak is giving it away. "Out of Poverty" repeatedly challenges entrepreneurs to take his ideas and to profit by them. Why isn't anyone making cheap eye glasses like he proposes? How about his treadle pumps and low-cost drip irrigation systems? Or his lockers for homeless people?

He's convincing. Whenever my own professional work overlaps with what he discusses, I'll pick up his book and make sure I'm paying attention to his advice. Others in the development community will do their jobs better if they do the same—especially those people involved in agriculture and subsistence farming.

And if you are far removed from the developing world and from development work in general, this is still a useful book for orienting yourself in such matters. Polak makes sure that his readers all know what he would like for them to do upon completing "Out of Poverty." Such clarity of purpose makes for a rather graceless and pushy book; but the man's got rock solid ideas.

---

## Rosalind says

I found this book to be a fairly easy read. I loved Polak's storytelling writing style in discussing poverty and the bottom of the pyramid in developing countries. He focused on the organization he founded, International Development Enterprises and one of their main accomplishments in bringing drip-irrigation to farmers in rural areas. Polak also discussed his other organization, D-Rev (Design for the Other 90%).

One of the main lessons I garnered from this book was to think simple (but critically and creatively). He stresses that the poor want products that are AFFORDABLE. He also emphasizes that subsidies and government aid do not get to the root of poverty; instead, they can exacerbate the problems because giving out free products not only undermines market forces (and thus companies that sell such products face the threat of going out of business), but also can make a problem worse when the free/subsidized products are lacking in follow-up services and/or quality. Lastly, I learned that increasing income for the poor is one of the most important things social enterprises and organizations should aim to do; the poor know what they need best, and when their income rises, they tend to spend on education, medical care, and other needs as they prioritize them.

I definitely recommend this read for those who are interested in social enterprise and poverty. I finished this book in just a few days, but I'm sure if you sat down for an evening/night, that you'd be able to finish it within one night.

---

## Mal Warwick says

A brilliant rural development specialist shares his ideas for ending poverty in the world

Paul Polak is an extraordinary man. A Czech Holocaust refugee as a child and a practicing psychiatrist throughout the 1960s and 70s, Dr. Polak turned his attention to the challenge of ending global poverty in 1981. In that year, he founded the International Development Enterprises (IDE), a Colorado-based nonprofit

organization distinguished by its successful launch of the treadle pump that enables farmers to irrigate very small plots of land at minimal cost. IDE's mission more generally is to fashion and develop new tools to help poor farmers and other "dollar-a-day" families in developing countries work their way out of poverty. Now nearing 80, Dr. Polak has relentlessly pursued this mission for the past three decades.

In *Out of Poverty*, Dr. Polak interweaves the IDE story and the principles that guide it with that of one Nepalese family who moved from poverty into the middle class. The fundamental precepts of Dr. Polak's work are clearly laid out in the introduction:

"1. The biggest reason most poor people are poor is because they don't have enough money.

"2. Most of the extremely poor people in the world earn their living now from one-acre farms.

"3. They can earn much more money by finding ways to grow and sell high-value labor-intensive crops such as off-season fruits and vegetables.

"4. To do that, they need access to very cheap small-farm irrigation, good seeds and fertilizer, and markets where they can sell their crops at a profit."

Much of *Out of Poverty* deals in detail with the challenges entailed in implementing these principles. Irrigation, including the story of the treadle pump, gets the most attention. Dr. Polak describes himself and the staff of IDE as what might be called catalysts rather than experts: from his perspective, the first step in any venture in rural development must be to talk to the people who will be affected by whatever is done — and listen to them. The IDE approach is resolutely bottoms-up, because "To move out of poverty, poor people have to invest their own time and money. The path out of poverty lies in releasing the energy of Third World entrepreneurs."

IDE's work over the years has tightly focused on farmers. As he notes, "most of the poor people in the world live in remote rural areas that will likely continue to be bypassed by successive waves of urban-centered industrial growth." However, in the concluding chapters of *Out of Poverty*, Dr. Polak also shares a number of ideas for helping slum-dwellers ("43 percent of the urban population in developing regions") move out of poverty, too. The book is chock full of great ideas for small-scale entrepreneurs.

Dr. Polak and IDE were pioneers in the bottoms-up development model that is fast emerging as the only approach likely to make a dent in the endemic poverty in so many poor countries.

Regrettably, *Out of Poverty* is not well written. It is endlessly repetitive, with the same phrases and anecdotes appearing in chapters throughout the book, and it fails to deliver on its promise of sharing many examples of families that have moved into the middle class through IDE's work, since the only story told in any detail is that of one Nepalese farm family. That's a great pity, since this is a message that needs to be disseminated far more widely among policymakers around the world. A second edition, reorganized and with additional examples, would be a boon to the development community.

(From [www.malwarwickonbooks.com](http://www.malwarwickonbooks.com))

---

## **Merrill Clark says**

I could read anti-poverty books all day. Lots of great ideas. The author started the IDE organization. IDE believes in bottom-up economics, help the small farmer with an acre or less, rather than top-down, massive

payments to governments and NGOs and rather than help the larger farmer. The author does not like government handouts and makes a good case for cutting them down/out. I remember being in Uganda for two weeks and seeing the many white UN Range Rovers amidst the Uganda poverty.

The author repeatedly repeats himself, as I just did, with his solutions. IDE has propagated the inexpensive "treadle" pump, accessing water at will and "drip" irrigation, slowly irrigating crops. The author also encourages knowing the local market, what is selling and for how much and encouraging through drip irrigation the sale of out of season products at higher prices. And the author encourages talking to poor people, to see what motivates and concerns them. As I write this, the thought comes to mind that the author makes a good case for "counciling" among the many players to solve the problems of the world.

---

## **Bojan Tunguz says**

I am not really someone who gets excited about books on poverty, poverty alleviation, and "social" work in general. Not out of callousness or unconcern with those affected by these issues. I just find most writing on this subject very intellectually shallow, and filled with do-good rhetoric without any concrete realizable effects. In fact, the total lack of success of all well-meaning and over bloated poverty reduction programs, both in the West and the Third World, have made me a bit cynical about the prospects of investing any measure of intellectual effort into trying to understand these problems and appreciate the solutions that really work. So with all that in mind, I was quite amazed with how interesting, educational and inspiring "Out of Poverty" turned out to be.

There are two main features of the book "Out of Poverty" that make it stand out compared to all the other poverty and poverty relief accounts that I've come across. The first one is that this is a very hands-on down-to-earth approach to understanding and working with poor people. The author is not a first-world think tank wonk who spends most of his time immersed in the library of some ivory tower institution. He spent a considerable amount of time talking to, and most importantly listening to poor people from around the world. Every page of this book exudes the sense of trust that people who are most affected by poverty are the ones who understand their predicament the best and are able to provide the best insight for the possible solutions to their problems. Which brings me to the second distinguishing feature of this book: its unwavering belief in the enterprising spirit of every human being. There is no stronger antidote to the patronizing cynicism that permeates thinking and discussion of the global poverty than reading this book. The author gives examples, in page after page, of the ingenuity and willingness to try new things exhibited by the small farm owners from all corners of the world. This is a welcome and refreshing alternative to the often bleak outlook that many of the World organizations and institutions often exhibit when it comes to actually believing in ability of the poor to uplift themselves out of poverty by the dint of their own efforts.

The book is not without its shortcomings. It feels repetitive and overly focused on just a few topics and products that the author is intimately familiar with (treadle pumps and drip irrigation). There are a few attempts to extend insights from these very successful programs to dealing with poverty in other settings, but they seem naive and not well thought out. (Most of the poorest of the poor in the West have some social and psychological issues that would make them inadequate candidates for an enterprising approach to wealth creation.) Nonetheless, I still think that the insights gleaned from this book are very valuable and an important step in the right direction even for those situations.

---

## Alex says

I found myself constantly wondering if this book actually had an editor because the repetition of ideas, anecdotes, etc. was wild.

---

## Stan Lee says

Paul Polak makes his argument for ending poverty through empowering the impoverished to increase their income. While the book at times reads like an ad for IDE, the organization he founded, it's insights into poverty gained through direct observation and interaction makes this book a great read. Polak is not shy of criticizing the work of development firms nor any large establishment. He advocates for a purely private market solution to end poverty. The book follows the structure of an individual's story interjected with Polak's commentary.

---

## Juan Pablo says

I found this book irritating. Not only the lack of solid numbers or peer reviews to back his claims, that he uses anecdotal evidence or numbers obtained through his own NGO, but the fact that it completely ignores how making some poor farmers better off than others in their communities through market practices might, at first, throw awesome results but at the end might just cause more inequalities and tensions in their original communities. That today it's been proven that not only poverty (or lack of wealth generation) is the problem, but also the inequalities that have risen in market economies. That when one successful person begins accumulating more it makes it harder for others to succeed. That "free" markets don't exist and that there is no evidence whatsoever that they can exist or that a "free" market will create perfect and fair competition. What we DO have is evidence that highly competitive and highly unequal societies also tend to be more violent and criminal (the numbers are extensive). The author's approach might work if it involved WHOLE communities and communal profits instead of working with few private owners. It also doesn't mention what happens with the ones that don't own land in the first place. His approach might at first look good, but I'm sure in the long run it will end with the same problems that inequalities have caused in other countries.

---

## Nanette says

This book is inspiring, but objectively the book could be written better. I wished the examples are more diverse, rather than hyper-specific and over-elaborated examples on treadle pumps and small-plot farming. Still, I would refer to the book again to gain the high level principles.

---

## Christina Brady says

The author has interesting ideas about how to get out of poverty. However, he is incredibly redundant and the only support that he has for his theory is his own NGO and their experiences.

It provides a different way of approaching poverty elimination, but it comes across as propaganda for his

own NGO. The redundancy and only citing his own org and its work cast doubt about his techniques.

---

### **Katelyn says**

Fairly easy read - doesn't feel like a textbook. I wish there was a newer edition of this book as some of the information is 10+ years old. Big plus-> some humor thrown in to keep the reader interested.

---