

Relief, Rehabilitation, & Development

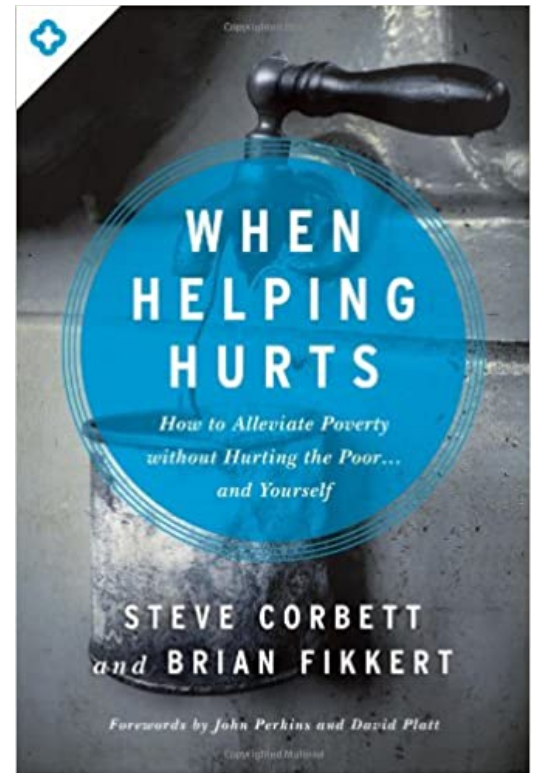
Excerpt abridged from *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert (2012) pp. 99-101

You turn on the evening news and see that a tsunami has devastated Indonesia, leaving millions without food, adequate clothing, or shelter. Following a commercial break, the news returns and features a story about the growing number of homeless men in your city, who are also without food, adequate clothing, or shelter. At first glance the appropriate responses to each of these crises might seem to be very similar. The people in both situations need food, clothing, and housing, and providing these things to both groups seems to be the obvious solution. But there is something nagging in us as we reflect on these two news stories. Deep down it seems like the people in these two crises are in very different situations and require different types of help.

How should we think about these scenarios? Are there principles to guide us to the appropriate response in each case?

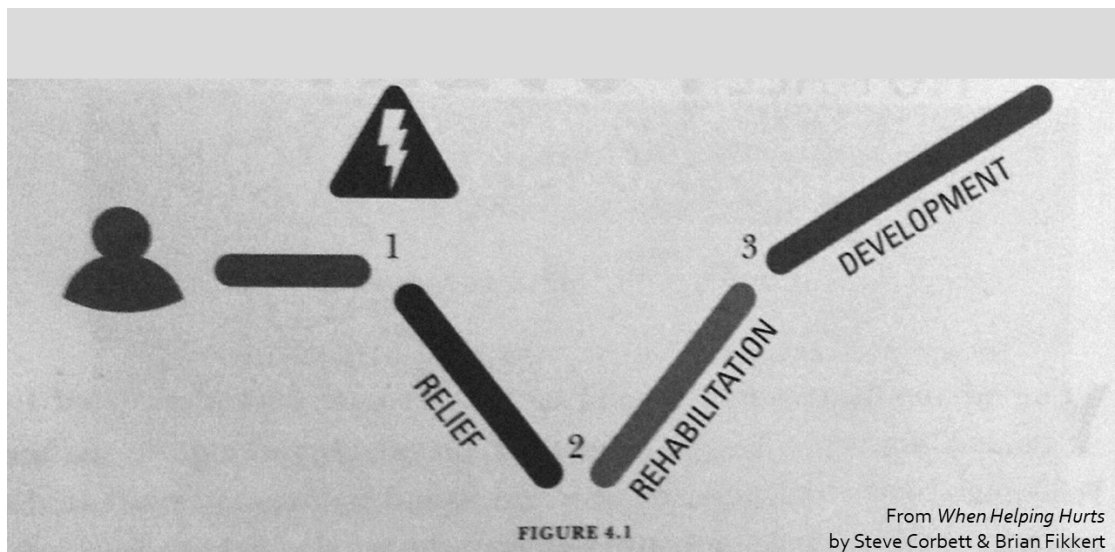
A helpful first step in thinking about working with the poor in any context is to discern whether the situation calls for relief, rehabilitation, or development. In fact, the failure to distinguish among these situations is one of the most common reasons that poverty-alleviation efforts often do harm.

“Relief” can be defined as the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis. As pictured in figure 4.1 (next page), when a crisis such as the Indonesian tsunami strikes at point 1, people are nearly or even completely helpless and experience plummeting economic conditions. There is a need to halt the free fall, to “stop the bleeding,” and this is what



relief attempts to do. The key feature of relief is a provider-receiver dynamic in which the provider gives assistance - often material - to the receiver, who is largely incapable of helping himself at that time. The Good Samaritan's bandaging of the helpless man who lay bleeding along the roadside is an excellent example of relief applied appropriately.

"Rehabilitation" begins as soon as the bleeding stops; it seeks to restore people and their communities to the positive elements of their pre-crisis conditions. The key feature of rehabilitation is a dynamic of working *with* the tsunami victims as they participate in their own recovery, moving from point 2 to point 3.



"Development" is a process of ongoing change that moves all the people involved - both the "helpers" and the "helped" - closer to being in right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation. In particular, as the materially poor develop, they are better able to fulfill their calling of glorifying God by working and supporting themselves and their families with the fruits of that work. Development is not done *to* people or *for* people, but *with* people. The key dynamic in development is promoting an empowering process in which all people involved - both the "helpers" and the "helped" - become more of what God created them to be, moving beyond point 3 to levels of reconciliation that they have not experienced before.

It is absolutely crucial that we determine whether relief, rehabilitation, or development is the appropriate intervention. **One of the biggest mistakes that North American churches make - by far - is in applying relief in situations in which rehabilitation or development is the appropriate intervention.**

The Good Samaritan's handouts were appropriate for the person at point 1, a victim who needed material assistance to stop the bleeding and even prevent death; however, the person at point 3 is not facing an emergency, and handouts of material assistance to such people do not help restore them to being the productive stewards that they were created to be. In fact, as we saw in chapter 2, applying a material solution to the person at point 3, whose underlying problem - like ours - is relational, is likely to do harm to this person and to the provider of the material assistance, exacerbating the brokenness in the four key relationships for both of them.