

ANCIENT VISIONS...

Traditional lifestyles are continuously being challenged to renew themselves. Perceptions about the future, and the way to get there, differs according to one's cultural background, age, sex, the country one lives in, and economic position. During a traditional festival called *Ndaam Koya*, David Millar of the Compas partner organisation CECIK encountered Adongo Nso, an elder in the Gowrie-Kunkwa community in Northern Ghana. He played an ancient musical instrument, with strange and beautiful rhythms, to herald the occasion. This was the first time David had seen this instrument or heard its music, in spite of several years of working with the community. He engaged elder Nso in a discussion, which resulted in some intriguing revelations.

David: *"How old is this instrument and how long have you been playing it? I have been coming here for your 'Ndaam Koya' festivals for many years but I have never seen it or heard you play."*

Elder Nso: It is an ancient instrument used by our ancestors to sing praise, or for burial songs. Only my family have the skill to manufacture this instrument and use it. You cannot find it elsewhere.

David: *"I imagine you have quite a large family. How many of you play this instrument and how many of the young ones are learning it from you?"*

Elder Nso: Only two of us use it — me and my twin brother. Our sons and grandsons refused to pick it up because they say it is for poor men and it will make them perpetually poor. You see! Our people see poverty in many dimensions. In addition to not having material things poverty can also be seen in terms of spirituality, knowledge and skills.

David: *"Can you explain these other dimensions of poverty a bit more?"*



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Elder Nso: The missionaries were the first to tell us about our spiritual poverty. They thought it poverty to worship our ancestors. They also made sure we got even poorer by doing everything to destroy our religion. Then the government workers came with their knowledge about food production and again told us that our own knowledge and skills were poor. They also made us poorer by trying to destroy our knowledge and replace it with theirs. Today we have large-scale poverty among our people and those who replaced and scorned our customs, knowledge and skills are responsible for it.

David: *"What do you suggest to alleviate poverty?"*

Elder Nso: The government should certainly look at issues related to material poverty. But poverty in knowledge, skills and spirituality should be addressed at the same time!

...AND NEW CHALLENGES

The discussion between David Millar and elder Adongo Nso urges development organisations to take a critical look at the issue of poverty. The worldview of the people we often refer to as the rural poor can be very rich and revealing. The general definition of poverty and its causes need to be amplified by how the people themselves see it. For us, development should be a process in which rural people are supported in finding new ways of sustaining their livelihood and culture. This is particularly relevant for the youth, who will need motivation and wisdom in order to take pride in further developing the valuable aspects of traditional life styles. Change agents, who want to play a role in such a development process, need to deal creatively with local knowledge, practices and beliefs. That is the challenge of endogenous development.

David Millar, Katrien van t Hooft, Bertus Haverkort, Wim Hiemstra