

WHOLISTIC EDUCATION IN THE CHURCH

By Robert Munson

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“We must see the whole man and his total need. If you only see his mental need you will become an educator. If you only see his political oppression, you will become a revolutionary or a politician. And if you see only his spiritual need, you will become a religionist. It is in seeing the whole man, with the strongest emphasis on the spiritual that you become a Christian witness, a missionary, an evangelist, a communicator of God’s Word.”

-Franklin Graham¹

Introduction

Education in the church tends to focus on Bible training, evangelism, spiritual discipleship, and church skills training. These generally do not need to be justified in the church. Most Christians assume that these are normal, even necessary educative functions of the church. However, training that is outside of these areas is often looked upon with suspicion in Evangelical churches. This paper will look at the basis for wholistic training, and address some aspects necessary for such training to be effectively carried out.

Wholism (sometimes spelled “Holism”) involves treating the whole. This can mean the whole person, the whole church, the whole community, and the whole society. It seeks help with physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.² It seeks to address issues of sin, poverty, sickness, injustice, and relationship with God.³

A serious question by many is whether wholistic education is “Christian”. If it is, then it is appropriate, perhaps, for church. If it is not, then it must, presumably, be banned from church. Wholistic education differs from other types of training in its goals. Warren Benson notes that educational goals flow from metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology... areas of philosophy of education.⁴ The question ultimately then is whether the goals of wholistic education is consistent with,

¹*CHE Overview* {Modesto, CA: Medical Ambassadors International, 2005), 1-1

²Stan Guthrie, *Mission in the Third Millenium* (Combria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000), 126.

³Sergio E. Arevalo Jr., *Spirituality for Wholistic Missions* (Cabanatuan City, Phils.: Wholistic Mission Institute, 1995), 3.

⁴Warren S. Benson, “Philosophical Foundations of Christian Education” in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the 21st Century*, Michael Anthony, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 28.

and indeed drawn from, a Christian philosophy of education. Kirbyjohn Caldwell discusses five general categories of reasons that church leaders or church members disagree with the goals of wholism (within the church context).

1. Wholism is not the church's business. The church is called for evangelism and spiritual growth of people.
2. Wholism may be a fine idea, but it is easier (and perhaps more fun) to complain about social ills than do anything about them. Ultimately, it is not worth the church getting involved in.
3. Wholism may be good, but it is the government's job. The church should focus on its job, and the government on its.
4. Wholism is a strange foreign-sounding word. Odd people and churches talk about wholism a lot. It must be bad.
5. Wholism is not scriptural. The Bible says to go into all the world to preach the gospel... not do all of that other stuff.⁵

All of these viewpoints (except for perhaps #4) comes from distinct axiological or epistemological viewpoints. These must be dealt with based on a sound philosophy of education.

Christian metaphysics and epistemology can be looked at from the work of George Knight. He has “seven hallmarks” that he believes describes Christian epistemology. Two of them relate to the epistemological (and metaphysical) basis for wholism.

1. The biblical perspective is that all truth is God's truth. Therefore, the distinction between sacred and secular truth is a false dichotomy.
6. The various sources of knowledge available to the Christian—the special revelation of Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ, the general revelation of the natural world, and reason—are complementary and should be used in light of the biblical pattern.⁶

Statement one eradicates the dualism common in churches that separates “Spiritual Truth” from “Secular Truth”. The belief that spiritual truths are more godly than other truths is unjustified. Statement six notes three sources of knowledge and, by implication, the basis for our metaphysics. Reality is understood as God and the physical universe. Our basis for knowledge of these comes from the Bible (God's special revelation to us), our reason, and our sense-based study of the universe. Combining statements one and six, one sees that truth is consistent with sound understanding of the Bible, sound reason, and correct understanding of the universe. Therefore, the statement “5 times

⁵Kirbyjohn Caldwell, “Why Do Wholistic Ministry,” *Willow Magazine*, Issue #1, 2006.

⁶Benson.

6 equals 30” does not have to be proven by chapter and verse in the Bible to be recognized as true. However, it must not be contradicted by the Bible. The end result is the Christians are not justified to separate spiritual truth from other truths. Neither are they justified to separate Biblical truths from extrabiblical truths.

Additionally, the goals of education should flow from sound Christian axiology. Axiology speaks of the what is good or proper. The study of the Bible should leave one with a clear understanding that God cares about the wholistic goals. Jesus’ call to ministry in Luke 4 is wholistic (concerned with spiritual, physical, and relational issues). The Great Commandment speaks of love for God (“spiritual”) and love for man. Subsequent to the listing in Luke 10 is clarification that part of love for man involves meeting felt physical needs of others. Isaiah 1, Isaiah 58, Micah 6 and others emphasizes that concern for the physical needs of others is a necessary part of one’s relationship with God. The wisdom literature of the Bible, particularly Proverbs, deals with a wide variety of aspects of an individual’s (or community’s) life, not just traditionally spiritual aspects. It is clear that God cares about the spirit of man, as well all other aspects of people’s being and interactions. In other words, God cares for people wholistically.

The sum of the above discussion leads one to see that Christian epistemology, metaphysics, and axiology leads one to recognize that wholistic goals as appropriate for Christian education. Wholistic goals define what changes (knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitude) should occur in the learner. They also define the content of the learning, and ultimately the methodology.⁷

Historically, a gap has existed between advocates of evangelism, aimed at conversion and salvation of souls, and advocates of social action, known for its focus on social transformation and political involvements. On one hand, we witness evangelistic crusades typically culminating in altar calls by Billy Graham or Luis Palau. On the other hand, we observe and read about the manifestations of Liberation Theology. This unresolved dichotomy has been and still is the result of a liberal-fundamentalist split in the early 1900s that continues to impact our missiological thinking into the 21st century.⁸

⁷Leroy Ford, *Design for Teaching and Training: A Self-Study Guide to Lesson Planning* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 24-25.

⁸Jean-Paul Heldt, “Revisiting the ‘Whole Gospel’: Toward a Biblical Model of Holistic Mission in the 21st Century,” *Missiology: An International Review* 32, no. 2 (April 2004): 151.

MODELS OF WHOLISTIC EDUCATION

There are many models used in different church groups, religious NGOs, and secular organizations. While many models exist, two here will be covered that are generally considered to be both wholistic and Christian in their orientations. While they may describe themselves by different names, for the purpose of this paper they will be called “Wholistic Health” and “Wholistic Growth”.

Wholistic Health

The first model, here described as “Wholistic Health” is the model more generally called “Community Health Evangelism” or “Community Health Education” (often shortened to “CHE”). CHE was developed and maintained by Lifewind International (formerly known as Medical Ambassadors International). The goal of CHE is to teach “Good Health”. However, the health described is not narrowly viewed as physical health. Rather, health is viewed as having good relationships. This is seen as involving four areas:

- Good relationship with self (emotional, some physical)
- Good relationship with others (relational)
- Good relationship with God (spiritual)
- Good relationship with environment (ecology, and physical)⁹

Self	Others	God	Environment
Self-Acceptance	Life in Boundaries	Follow-up	Shelter
To Be Needed	Role in Society	Evangelism	Literacy
Self-Esteem	Loving Others	Stewardship	Exercise
Stability	Relationships	Discipleship	Nutrition
Intimacy	Acceptance	Obeying God	Agriculture
Purpose	Freedom	Growing With God	Clean Water
Rest	Safety	Relationship With God	Medical Care/Disease Prevention

⁹CHE, 1-4.

CHE in its full implementation as a community outreach is to have the following core values:

First: The integration of physical and spiritual ministry.

Second: Multiplication of all work through intensive training.

Third: An emphasis on prevention of disease rather than cure.

Fourth: Community ownership of a program directed by the community members themselves with a minimum of outside resources.

Fifth: Home-visiting in which CHEs meet with their neighbors sharing the transferable truths they have learned.

Sixth: The program is sustainable after the training team leaves.

Seventh: The program is effective in helping people physically and spiritually.

Eighth: The program is sensitively adapted to meet the needs of a particular people.¹⁰

The focus of this form of wholistic education is for it to spread out from the church into the community. Growth groups will meet at homes in local neighborhoods. The training is for the church and the unchurched community. The goal is community health. This violates much of church growth theory that focuses on church health (not really caring what happens to the surrounding community). However, the belief in CHE is that a healthy church in an unhealthy community is inherently unhealthy. The kingdom of God is transform and provide wholistic health to individuals, families, and communities.

Wholistic Growth

A second model of wholistic training might be described as “wholistic growth”. It is sometimes described as the “Luke 2:52 Model”. That is because it takes as its critical verse, Luke 2:52. This verse says, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”¹¹ This verse describes four growth aspects in Jesus.

- Mental Growth (“increased in wisdom”)
- Physical Growth (“increased in stature”)
- Spiritual Growth (“increased in favor with God”)
- Social Growth (“increased in favor with man”)

Growth flows from need (no point in growing in areas that there are no need). Therefore the educational program must look at what are needs in these four areas.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., 1-10.

¹¹The Holy Bible. King James Version.

¹²Bob Moffitt, *If Jesus Were Mayor* (Phoenix, AZ: Harvest Foundation, 2004), 259-260.

Wisdom	Physical	Spiritual	Social
<i>(Wisdom is not intellectual status, educational experience, mental development, or knowledge)</i>	Health, sanitation	Need for God	Family relationships
God's instructions for physical growth	Ecology	Spiritual salvation	Church relationship
God's instructions for spiritual growth	Clothing, shelter	Prayer	Community relationships
God's instruction for social relationships	Food	Worship	Accountability
	Economy		Friendship

Looking at diverse areas of growth is not enough. It must also be diverse (wholistic) in contexts of service. These contexts cover four areas:

- Family includes spouses, children, parents, brothers, sisters, in-laws, and extended family, roommates, and close friends.
- Church includes pastors, church leaders, church members, church group members, and church building.
- Local Community includes neighbors, colleagues, those with special needs, action groups for community issues, the physical environment, school, and work environment.
- Distant Community includes victims of natural disasters and wars, and unreached people groups.¹³

Combining of areas of need and contexts of service results in a four by four matrix for needs evaluation

	Wisdom	Physical	Spiritual	Social
Family				
Church				
Community				
Distant Community				

Training can involve different steps, but the focus is the critical thing. Wholistic education should (especially

¹³Ibid., ch. 12.

within the context of the local church) focus on growing a ministering church. This is done by growing a church of ministers. "The effective ministering church becomes the enabling center to equip for

ministry-related evangelism. ... If the church is to grow up to experience Christ's fullness, evangelism must be seen as a beginning rather than an end, otherwise it leaves no room for nurture and growth. Christ's lordship must affect the whole of life, and this can only happen as the body facilitates that growth."¹⁴

To teach wholistic ministry, to create ministers, teaching must model wholistic ministry. One method would involve a five step plan:

- Pray (As individuals and as a group)
- Identify the need(s) (based on the matrix above)
- Make a plan to meet the need and act.
- Reflect and journal. Share with others for reflection and accountability.
- Summarize and evaluate the exercise.¹⁵

Other models exist. Another, more complex model for evaluation is shown in Appendix A.

¹⁴John R. Cheyne, *Incarnational Agents: A Guide to Developmental Ministry* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1996), 69.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 268.

WHOLISTIC EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

Wholistic Education is different--different from church as usual. That is because it violates many church norms.

Church Focus/Norms	Wholism Focus
Church Growth	Kingdom Development
Bringing people into the church	Sending ministers out of the church
Cognitive development	Wholistic development
Individual	Community
Church Programs	Community Partnerships
Reaching out to the community	Being part of the community

In order for the evangelical church, and here I mean the local congregation, to have an authoritative and moral voice in the public square on the serious problems facing our society the church needs to be perceived, not as a special interest group or political voting base which has an agenda of self-interest and self-preservation, but rather one that puts the interests of others above its own interests. In order for the church to have a voice “in the public” and affect the public square with the values of the kingdom, the Church needs to have a *public* voice. Its voice cannot enter the public square to discuss public matters on “the basis of private truths” geared to protect the church’s or its adherent’s cultural status and lifestyle.¹⁶

Wholistic training can occur in church services and in seminars, but the primary forms of training are mentoring and small group. However, one has to look at the term “small group” advisedly. Wholistic growth groups are not cell groups. Cell groups are focused on cognitive growth, simple and repetitive format, and fitting into the “Celebration and Cell” church structure. Wholistic growth groups are not Sunday school classes. Sunday School is also focused on cognitive growth, structured training format, and meeting in a fairly centralized location. Wholistic growth groups are not ministry teams. Ministry teams are groups that focus on ministry but do not prioritize team or individual growth. Wholistic growth groups are not Growth or Support Groups, but they come closer to them than the other groups. Growth Groups or Support Groups seek to build up members in a wholistic manner, but are not tied to outwardly focused ministry. One might say that wholistic growth groups...

¹⁶Chip M. Anderson, “Widows in our Temple Courts (Mk 12:38-44): The Public Advocacy Role of the Local Congregation as Christian Discipleship”. Paper delivered at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the *Evangelical Theological Society* in Washington DC. Available at www.wordsntone.com , 22.

- are geographically in the community like cell groups.
- utilize appropriate and organized training for the membership like Sunday school classes.
- focus on tangible activity like ministry teams
- are structured to develop individual and team growth like support or growth groups.

Example One. Divine Love Families

Divine Love Families is a group that has gone through several transformations. This is quite appropriate since groups change and grow. Groups should be dynamic, rather than static structures. The group began by accident. Pastor Jonah and Grace, Korean missionaries, began a relief/development outreach to children who work in the City Market. Children would come on Saturday mornings and watch a movie, sing songs, hear a Bible story and have lunch. This program met felt needs of entertainment and food for the children. Some parents, particularly mothers, would bring their children and hang around (the children's program meets at Baguio Mission Center). The mothers, having felt needs for socialization and something to do while their children are in the program. Therefore, a Bible class (structurally, a cell group) was begun with them during this time.

Bible classes/cell groups are good, but they tend to stagnate because cognitive development does not lead to wholistically transformed lives. But that does not mean that they can't breed greater things. One member, Venus, became inspired by the children's program, and saw the need for something similar in her community. Working with us, some other mothers in the Bible class, the local DSWD daycare, and the barangay leadership, she was able to form a local kids club, 'Divine Love Kids Club'. It now exists in three barangays (Honeymoon, City Camp Proper, and Bayan Park). Originally it was meant for preschoolers, but older children began to come, and youth wanted to help in running the clubs.

Now there is partnership between mission, church, government, and government agency. Several felt needs were being met, but more was needed. Several of the families did not have a church home, so they joined Union International Church. Those who had been previously baptized were put in a discipleship Sunday school class. Those who were new believers, seekers, or otherwise not yet baptized, were placed in a new believers class. This was a necessary step. The structured training of the Sunday School filled in the gaps that were left from the Saturday bible group.

Sunday School is good, but it is also cognitively based and leads to ministerial stagnation. It neither meets all felt needs, nor does it (often) prepare individuals for ministry. After a lot of prayer, and a lot of needs analysis, it was determined that one of the great felt needs was financial stability.

Many sell plastic bags in the city market. They buy the bags piecemeal at retail prices and sell them individually at above market prices. The result is an unreliable income, barely adequate to maintain clothes, food, and shelter. The decision was to develop a church-based business cooperative. It would be perfectly appropriate to describe this as a wholistic growth group. Two afternoons of training clarified the purpose of the cooperative, the Biblical basis for it, and the principles of stewardship and mutuality within the group. The goal is to create a legal cooperative that pools resources, orders plastic bags (and other products) in bulk wholesale, and sells to individuals and institutions at retail. After the two afternoons, individuals were given the option to commit to the group or not. 13 individuals (families in actuality) committed to the group. They chose a name for their group, a group song, set up a plan of action, and a meeting schedule. They now meet every Thursday afternoon for Bible study, prayer, and learning of kingdom principles and sound business practices. The training is provided by a Christian who has been trained in community development and has practiced development professionally for approximately 20 years. The goal is that as the group gains cohesion and the business side grows, the cooperative will be able to reach out to those in the community that need wholistic (spiritual, social, and economic) transformation.

Example 2: Pugo Christian Fellowship

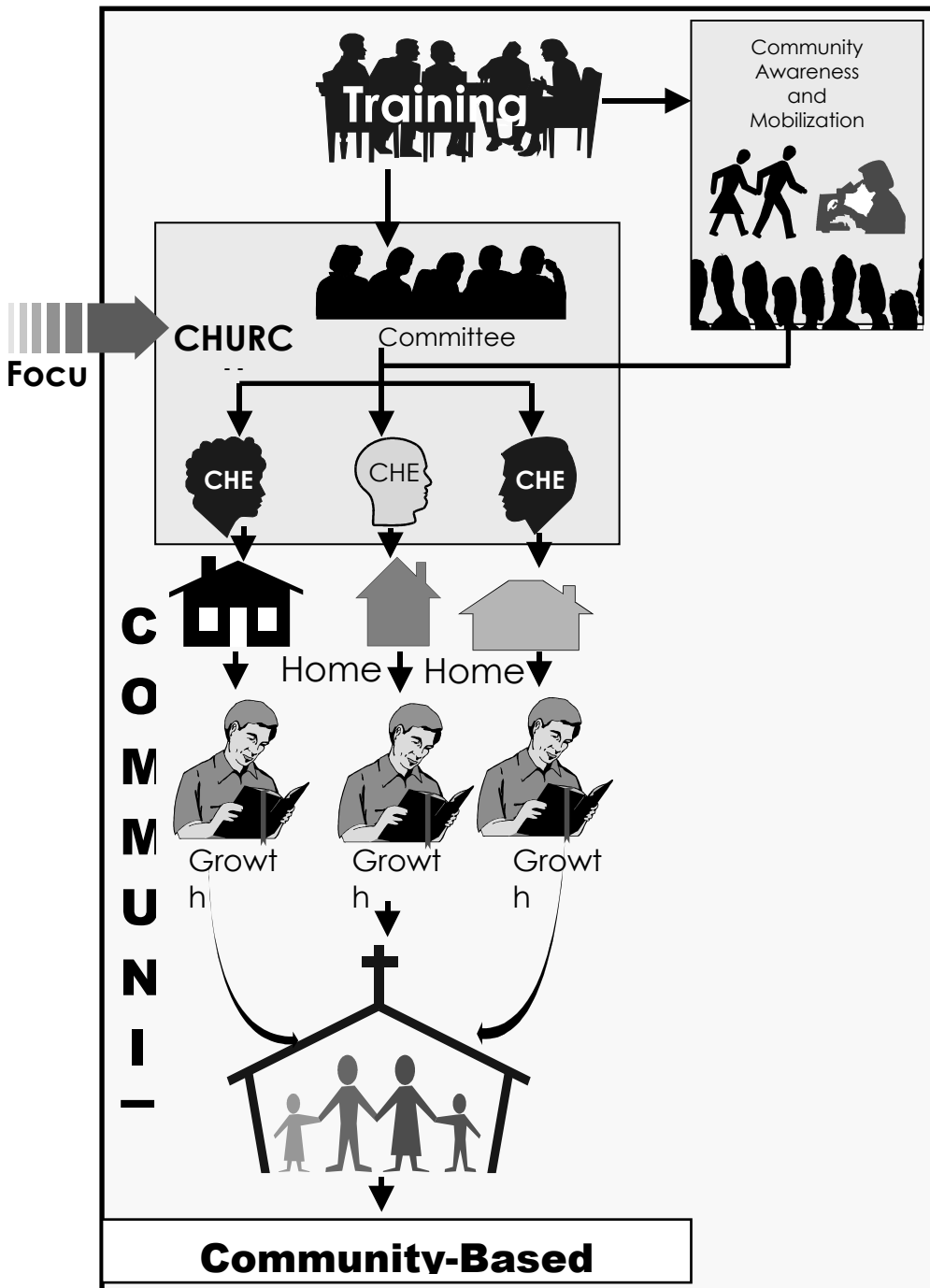
While Divine Love Families may show wholistic education moving along in a fairly haphazard fashion, Pugo Christian Fellowship has decided to reach out to its community in a more structured manner. The pastor, and several other members of the community outreach team decided to be trained in church-based community development methods. This covered several months and included bible training, prayer, team building, development theory and methodology, and fieldwork. Part of the fieldwork was doing an RRA (Rapid Rural Assessment). The RRA and community interviews resulted in three major areas of felt needs identified.

Felt Need #1. Youth Problems.

Felt Need #2. Economic/Agrarian Problems.

Felt Need #3 General sense of community breakdown.

This led to development of three different programs. For the youth problems, the church has spoken to the Principal of the local high school, and jointly agreed to the need of a better Christian values program in the school. For the economic problems, training seminars combining biblical principles with improved rice methodology (and breeds of rice) is being developed. For the community breakdown, a Church-based CHE program will be set up to improve wholistic “health”.



¹⁷CHE, 1-20.

CONCLUSIONS

Most American evangelical theologians emphasize the future and spiritual dimensions of the kingdom of God, but neglect the present and social aspects. Evangelicals have a highly privatized, highly individualized faith that does not equip or empower them to understand or act to solve social problems. Charity and some social reform, yes; but social justice, no. When he was about 70 years old, Billy Graham wrote in Transformation (Jan-Mar, 1989, p.2):

“I can no longer proclaim the Cross and the Resurrection without proclaiming the whole message of the kingdom which is justice for all.”

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 14:17 (my paraphrase): ‘The kingdom of God is . . . justice, shalom and joy in the Holy Spirit.’ A person enters the kingdom by being born-again, but what is life in the kingdom of God to be like?¹⁸

Wholistic education in the church and in the community can help the church be missional, relevant, and transforming in and with their respective communities. It can help bring the whole message of the kingdom... “justice, shalom and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁸Lowell Noble, “Kingdom of God.” [on-line article] available from <http://www.jmpf.org/The%20Kingdom%20of%20God.doc> ; accessed 02 March 2008.

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APPENDIX A

Alternative Set of Wholistic Factors¹⁹

Indicators and Suggested Weightings

Spiritual Indicators

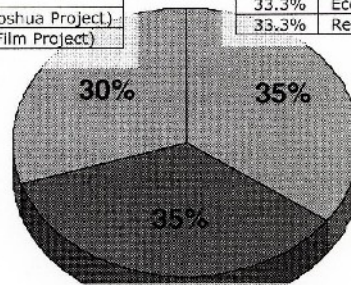
(Overall weight 30%)

Weight	Indicator	Source
30%	% Evangelical	(Operation World)
15%	% Evangelical Growth Rate	(Operation World)
15%	% Christian Adherents	(Operation World)
20%	% Population living in Unreached / Least-Reached people group	(Joshua Project)
10%	% with Bible in heart language	(SIL / Joshua Project)
10%	% with Jesus Film in heart language	(Jesus Film Project)

Behavioral Indicators

(Overall weight 35%)

Weight	Indicator	Source
33.3%	Corruption Index	Transparency Intl
33.3%	Economic Freedom Index	Heritage Foundation
33.3%	Religious Persecution Index	Open Doors, CSI, ICC



Humanitarian Indicators

(Overall weight 35%)

(3 different iterations using three different Humanitarian Indicator datasets)

Dataset #1

Human Development Index (HDI)	
Weight	Indicator
33.3%	Life Expectancy Index
33.3%	Education Index
33.3%	GDP Index

Dataset #2

ECHO Development Indicators	
Weight	Indicator
10%	Hidden Crisis Index
10%	Human Poverty Index
10%	Natural Disaster Index
10%	Conflicts Index
10%	Refugees Index
10%	Overall Population Index
10%	Child Under-Weight Index
10%	Child Mortality Index
10%	GPD Index 2000
10%	GPD Index 2005

Dataset #3

Geneva Global Indicators	
Weight	Indicator
20%	If available
20%	If available
20%	If available
20%	If available
20%	If available

¹⁹Stan Rowland, "Transformational Indicators," Paper delivered at the 2007 (May) CCIH Conference in Maryland.