Empowering Communities and Transforming Lives

Opportunity International: Pathways to Wellbeing Programme | Global

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"Empowering communities and transforming lives through holistic wellbeing," embodies the essence of Opportunity International, a global not-for-profit organization. Opportunity International's mission is to provide financial solutions and training to those living in poverty, enabling them to transform their lives, their children's futures, and their communities. With a vision of a world where everyone can live a life free from poverty, with dignity and purpose, the organisation operates in some of the poorest regions globally.

BACKGROUND

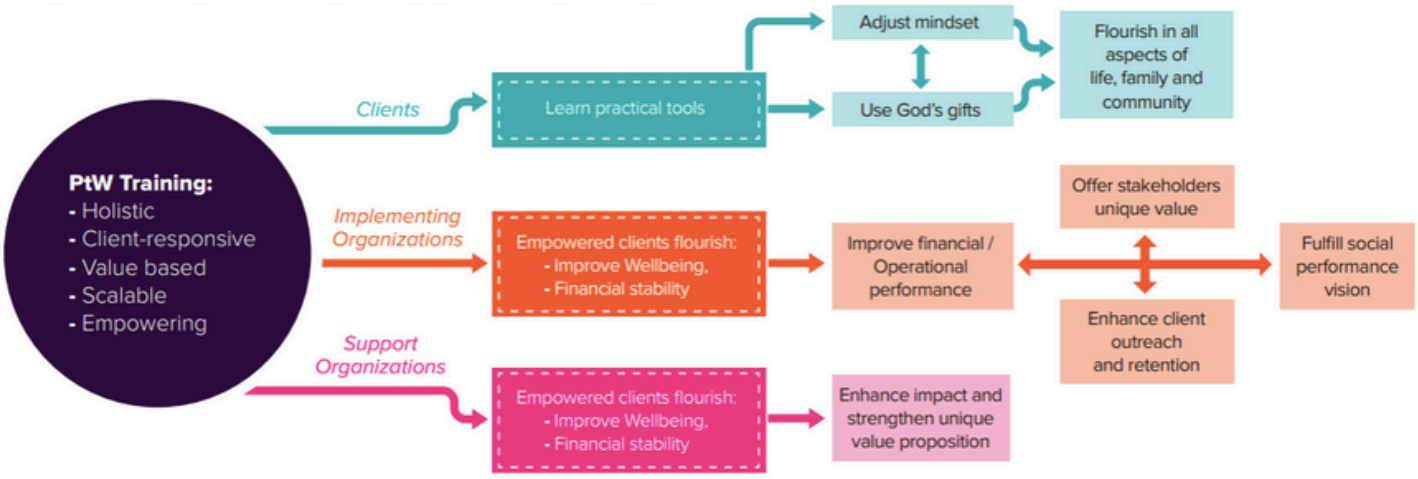
Opportunity International's Pathways to Wellbeing program (hereafter "Pathways") is a unique, holistic training program that conscientizes participants to the different areas where they and their households can develop. Between 2022-2023, the program was devised and tested in three poverty-stricken contexts—urban Colombia (1,200 participants), rural Malawi (1,850 participants), and throughout Ghana (6,050 participants). In two cases, participants were members of savings groups or churches, and in one situation—Ghana—they were microfinance clients. As an adult training program, Pathways is focused on less literate populations.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The Pathways program empowers people to adjust their mindset and use God's gifts so that they can flourish in all aspects of their lives, families, and communities. It is not a community development program. Rather, it is a holistic training designed to spark behaviour change in which participants own their own development process. Each of the 6 training modules focuses on 3-4 specific objectives that help participants learn practical tools, adjust their mindsets, and use God's gifts. The program also aims to benefit implementing organizations by helping to improve their financial or operational performance, and it seeks to benefit supporting organizations (like Opportunity) by enhancing impact and strengthening their unique value proposition to donors (see figure 1.)

Poverty presents barriers and opportunities across spiritual, social, and physical aspects of life, yet most development programs specialize for efficiency. The Pathways program offers a middle ground by addressing multiple dimensions of poverty while enabling delivery by organizations that maintain a primary focus on one intervention, finance in the case of Opportunity.

Figure 1. Pathways to Wellbeing Training System Theory of Change



Based on the concept of "shalom," the training curriculum drives towards joyful human flourishing through restored relationships with God, ourselves, others, and Creation (see figure 2).

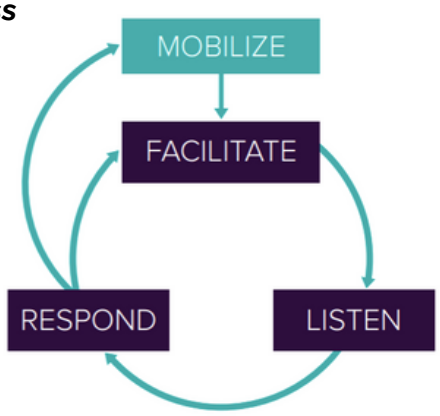
Figure 2. Shalom and Module Dimensions

The curriculum uses adult learning best practices and is story-based, featuring real client stories (video or presentations) to engage participants in discussions and practical applications. The materials are user-friendly for amateur or volunteer facilitators and low-literacy adults, with versions available in multiple languages.

RESULTS AND IMPACTS

During the two-year pilot test, Opportunity facilitated a joint learning process engaging implementing partners, facilitators, and clients. The system is designed to generate immediate feedback that facilitators and implementing partners can respond to by improving the training and/or mobilizing a more appropriate set of participants (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Pathways Training Implementation Process



The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system involves:

- Regular discussions among implementing partner staff and facilitators, and among Opportunity and implementing partner leaders.

- Evaluation forms designed for less literate populations and completed by a sample of several hundred participants, when they completed their second (and final) module of the pilot test. These asked participants some demographic questions, and to self-rate their level of knowledge, skills, and application around the objectives of each module, to report their level of satisfaction, and to answer a handful of "objective" knowledge or behavioural questions. These forms were administered before and after the training.
- In-depth client stories captured by implementing partner staff.

Participants in Malawi and Colombia experienced significant inner changes. In Malawi, improvements were seen in financial security, goal-setting, and self-worth. In Colombia, participants reported increased self-worth, hope, resilience, family well-being, and overall sense of well-being. Testimony from Participant:

"During the training, I discovered a profound appreciation for the message of unwavering hope in challenging times. This realization is inspiring me to maintain a steadfast mindset in my endeavors, knowing that difficulties are not to be feared but rather overcome with resilience and persistence."

– Sophia, Ghana

Participants also reported behavioral changes. In Malawi, after the training, more participants:

- Set goals and took steps to reach them (38% - 64%)
- Saved to reach goals (32% - 44%)
- Prepared themselves financially for difficult times and emergencies (40% - 52%)
- Had a mobile money account (36% - 64%)
- Made household decisions independently (36% - 52%)

In Colombia, after the training, more participants:

- Set goals and took steps to reach them (66% - 82%)
- Were able to construct healthy relationships in their families (29% - 39%)
- Divided household work equally between men and women (53% - 70%)
- Managed emotions, contributing to peace in the family (66% - 81%)

LEARNINGS

Throughout the implementation of the Pathways program, several challenges and lessons emerged. Engaging senior leadership was crucial, and a dedicated session for them proved valuable in securing their commitment. High staff turnover was particularly disruptive, highlighting the importance of appropriate incentives and the preference for full-time staff over part-time facilitators. The video presentations required adequate equipment and conditions, which were often challenging to meet, especially in rural areas. Time constraints were a persistent issue, with sessions frequently exceeding the allotted duration. Ensuring consistent participant attendance necessitated additional planning to help participants complete all sessions. The initial monitoring and evaluation system was found to be onerous for lean programs, leading to the development of a leaner system. Despite these challenges, the curriculum was well-received, with positive feedback on the facilitation guide, the engagement of internal values, the participatory approach, and the flexible framework. The program's success relied heavily on visionary leaders who could convey their commitment to staff and volunteers in both values-based and practical ways. Looking ahead, Opportunity International is actively seeking funds and partnerships for replication and exploring improvements such as additional videos, languages, and digitization.