
Editors' Introduction

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To open this issue, we remind ourselves of the basic mission of the *CRDA* journal, which is to contribute to the learning on

how to improve the way faithful Christians, whether practitioners, academic researchers, or both, engage the world and work to create thriving communities, both local and global (see [“About the Journal”](#))

As editors, our understanding of what thriving communities look like is broad, or holistic, and includes every area of life and an understanding that Christ reigns.

But working towards this holistic approach is easier said than done. As we have learned over the years, getting this basic mission right is exceedingly hard. On one side lurks the danger of over-spiritualizing everything, and ultimately acting as if conversion, true faith, prayer, and hope in the afterlife are the only things that really matter. On the other side, partly because integration is so hard, we fall into practices of focusing only on important, yet incomplete, material human needs, like agricultural yields, economic well-being, physical health, and the techniques and practices that achieve them.

Even though it is complex and hard to achieve, a holistic approach to our mission is and will continue to be central to every activity associated with nurturing thriving communities. It is thus essential that we foster constructive conversations that address the questions of basic human needs directly, even as we continually encourage contributors intentionally to address the faith-based elements of their work and research around it. Just as the Israelites were instructed to continually talk about the Law as given to Moses on the mountain, we too must talk about these things all the time so that they become a part of who we are (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

In the current issue, there is some of both of these elements of integration. First, basic questions of the role of spirituality and spiritual impact measurement methods are discussed directly in the contributions by fellow *CRDA* editor, David Bronkema, a conversation that continues in the curated transcript of the webinar *CRDA* hosted on the topic. Participant comments refer back especially to the contribution Jayakumar Christian made at the Accord meetings in October of 2022 when he expressed concern that measuring spiritual factors

threatened a “slicing off” of spiritual issues from all the others relevant to thriving communities.

The journal then turns to two topics of practical interest for Christian relief and development practitioners. First, Scott Sabin and his team at Plant With Purpose present an impact study of a joint PWP/Hope International program in Burundi that combines agriculture and creation care with a savings group program created and managed by Hope International. Agricultural production, increased savings, improved soil health, and community spiritual support all form part of the indicator package PWP finds compelling and worth measuring.

The next article focuses on recovery from substance abuse. Researchers from the Meros Center analyze a faith-based program that combines recovery techniques with financial literacy training. More research is necessary, but this pilot study marks the path. While the location of this study is in the United States, which is quite unusual for the articles of our journal, peer reviewers judged this to be of interest for our international audience because of its generalizable implications.

The issue concludes with a book review of Andrea Nelson Trice’s *Strong Together*, which encourages us to build culturally sensitive partnerships across the world’s different cultures. Roxanne Addink de Graaf of Partners Worldwide gives the book high marks in bringing forward “insights ... (that) can help build restorative relationships that bridge divides” (p. 36 in this issue).

Looking ahead, the *CRDA* journal anticipates a number of special issues on topics of great interest to the *CRDA* community. A special issue on gender mainstreaming and another on peacebuilding, are nearing completion. Other special issues currently in initial stages will address agriculture, WASH, and the role churches play church in relief, development, and advocacy efforts.

There is so much more that needs our attention. As you are led to address *CRDA* issues in your own arena, keep this journal in mind as a venue to share your research and reflections with like-minded people in this supportive community. Please reach out to us as editors as you begin thinking about and planning any such potential research; we would love to walk with you in the process of publication.